

# **PRACTICE AS ROLE ENACTMENT: MANAGING PURPOSEIVE SOPHISTICATED COOPERATION**

**BY**

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## ABSTRACT

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This doctoral dissertation proposes a fuller, more inclusive account of practice than that which dominates current discourse on organizations, which typically turns upon occupations, professions and jobs as manifestations of publicly recognized roles or functions within organized activity, established as a function of prescribed divisions of labour and the application of skills and techniques, and assumes that people interact in the ways that their assigned roles and functions are planned to work as interrelated parts of a shared task. The approach here is a reflexive process akin to what Lévi-Strauss characterizes as ‘bricolage’, using ready-to-hand materials linking narrative, literature and argument, adding pieces iteratively in an open-ended building process over the course of the dissertation. The reflexive process entails (a) the act of writing narratives (derived from the author’s own management experiences in the private, public and voluntary sectors) so as to produce insights and themes of interest in relation to the broader theme of practice; and (b) readings of certain key works of the literature on organizations and organized activity (including Sarbin and Allen, Denzin, Wiley, Collins, Elias, Mead, Habermas, Stacey and Mintzberg) so as to expose practice-related themes relevant to the construction of an alternative account which proposes the following: (1) Practice in organizations is communicative in nature and entails the enactment of roles. Conventionally, enactment is taken to mean that the role-incumbent meets expectations set by decision-makers and premised on conformity to preset structures within a metaphorical organizational space. In an alternative account of practice, however, enactment can be more accurately framed as a dialectical process of co-emergence of role and organization by virtue of the local social interaction of the persons involved. (2) In active life the mutually-exclusive emergent process and the spatial organizational metaphor necessarily co-exist. Reframing role enactment opens a path to new understanding, such that role enactment and practice thus become problematized in that practitioners can be seen as holding a paradoxical position of some considerable relevance to practice. Today’s predominantly objectivist management thinking primarily stresses accountability for the communicative interaction of others within the organizational space. The reflexive processual approach contests the adequacy and exclusivity of this position, because managing as an emergent practice is more comprehensively communicative and open-ended. (3) The co-presence of both the

objectivist and emergent accounts thus requires the manager paradoxically to hold both these views of role and organization at the same time in his or her experiences of managing. As paradox cannot be resolved, it is instead taken up by the manager-practitioner by virtue of the reflexivity central to all processes of communicative interaction. (4) It follows that acknowledging processes of enactment and the centrality of reflexivity in the practice of managing and bringing that to the attention of managers and management educators will enhance how managing sophisticated cooperation is understood and carried out.

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## INTRODUCTION

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This document constitutes my dissertation in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Professional Doctor of Management from the Business School of the University of Hertfordshire in Hatfield, UK. Its title, 'Practice as Role Enactment: Managing Sophisticated, Purposive Cooperation', indicates the themes that motivated this research effort and the area a contribution to knowledge may have been made. I shall argue that practice in organizations entails the enactment of roles, in which the practitioner paradoxically acts in conformity with structures (and strictures) of the objectified organization and his or her own designated role, while at the same time engaging freely in independent action through complex processes of relating. With specific reference to the practice of managing, this paradox is never resolved in experience but is instead taken up in action by the practitioner in the reflexive processes inherent in all communicative interaction.

My active life, which constitutes the context of this dissertation, largely consists of managing and participating in improvisational, and oftentimes opportunistic, emergent coalitions or groups attempting to carry forward equally emergent endeavours. While this formulation of what I do may seem to be anecdotally about me, I believe this to be in fact a description of a widespread, recurrent experience in organizations, one that often goes unrecognized as a legitimate strategy for actors in organizations moving into new territory, especially given the inherently fragile nature of organizational structure in the face of new initiatives. What is particular and unusual in my active life is that it explicitly follows a trajectory that is often ignored in conventional descriptions of managerial roles and activities. However, reflecting on what at first sight may seem an exceptional set of experiences can offer some illuminating insights into the field of management in general.

Throughout my adult life I have maintained a changing portfolio of engagements, paid or unpaid. At the time of writing I am engaged in an arc of activities that included heading the development of a large real estate project in downtown Montreal, Quebec; chairing the board of directors of a Canadian charity that sends volunteers to work with partners overseas in local community and economic development projects; leading an urban redevelopment project steering committee; sitting on the board of directors of an

environmental non-governmental organization in Toronto, Ontario –the list could go on. Each of these activities is a full practical engagement in its own right, taken up in relation to others as one or more have ended, or just added to my portfolio opportunistically. There is thus a constantly changing breadth and diversity of activity ongoing, all contingent on me, the person acting socially.

I often refer to this range of my involvements as my ‘active life’. The discussion of the active life was notably taken up by Thomas Merton (Palmer 1990), who had set out to tame his compulsion for intensive action through recourse to spirituality. Palmer himself (1990: 3) writes about his own active life as ‘citizen, parent, writer, teacher, administrator, community organizer’, taken altogether. In a similar vein, the notion of a ‘portfolio’ career has been introduced by Handy (2001) as part of the loosening of long-term employment structures.

Palmer calls attention to the role of spirituality in attaining a healthy, grounded active life. Handy is concerned with new patterns of working lives. My quest here is not spiritual, nor is it about altered structures of viable work; rather, as I believe my mode of active life is not acknowledged within mainstream views on practice, my quest is to arrive at a fuller, inclusive account of practice, reconfiguring management and organizational discourse by expanding the conception of practice to take into consideration one’s active life as lived. In viewing the account of this quest, the reader may expect to see many disregarded aspects of managerial practitioners’ experiences come into view.

Staying the course has not been without its challenges. There were many stops along the way where it was tempting to digress and delve more deeply into themes related to the specific way I do things in my particular world of activity, as the groups of people with whom I am involved struggle to find their way forward in uncertain and often indefinable situations. Some might say that inserting myself into such enterprises, and in a certain role, is what my ‘practice’ really is; and indeed a study of doing so might have been a valuable contribution. But this would have meant focusing on forms of activity as practice – the very thing that caused me discomfort in the first place – while my contention is that this is an incomplete account of practice at best.



Bourdieu talks about *doxa*, ‘the sum total of all theses tacitly deposited on the hither side of all inquiry’ (1977:168), the universe of the undisputed and undiscussed, the thinkable versus the unthinkable, the universe of orthodoxy or dominant discourse; all that is taken for granted – the self-evident. When there is a crisis of knowledge or the occurrence of an unexplainable incident, that which seems self-evident no longer is so: inquiry then opens up, bringing the non-discussible into discussion, the unarguable into argument.

In the context of the present inquiry, *doxa* is all that is not recognized as *practice* in what people do in their active lives. To take up this non-recognition is a crucial purpose of my study. I have always refused to constrain my action in the world within singular career and organizational conceptions, resisting the hegemony of dominant organizational views, which try to reduce what one does to a name or a title. With regard to practice, this reductive view of course raises issues of personal recognition and identity. I have chosen not to focus on such issues, preferring instead to examine the subject of practice more broadly.

The way practice is regarded and discussed most often refers to publicly observable behaviours, and takes for granted that these behaviours align themselves with pre-existing roles and organizational structures: ‘[V]oluntary human association always and everywhere implies interdependence ...and divided labour . . . To attain the common goal, or complete the common task, each actor necessarily performs a different portion of the common effort’ (Kemper 1972: 742). In other words, practice in organizations is commonly regarded as taking place within a paradigm of explicit roles or functions in some kind of organizational or social setting, more often than not prescribed by the division of labour performed by individuals in the production of goods or services.

It is not surprising that this way of perceiving the person in the organization came to dominate organizational thinking. Elias (2000) suggests that within the civilising process of the Western world, regimes of power on the path toward statehood needed to be sustained by knowledgeable people acting in defined and coordinated roles, which became increasingly differentiated as the size and scope of these regimes grew. Marx (Burkitt, 1991) held that centralization of the means of production produced ever-greater refinement in the division of labour required for production processes and that people were constrained to fit into the requisite categories. For Foucault (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1983), the rise of social professional disciplines developed in response to the state’s

increased control and confinement of the bodies and bodily functions of the populace (for example, asylums, prisons, schools, clinics, prostitution), requiring ever more differentiated expertise in the techniques of confinement and control at the same time as supplying the research settings necessary to develop that expertise on the part of certain individuals.

Once it is taken for granted that there must be a tidy fit between the way people function alone and together and how organizational structure, society and the economy work, scientific research avenues in that vein open up. An interesting example attempted to develop means to predict which occupational groups an individual might enter, and ‘analyzed the impact of various personality and taste factors (16 in number) on the occupational distribution (5 in number) of workers. Those factors were found to have strong effects that were generally consistent with a well functioning labour market sorting individuals into those jobs that most closely satisfy their individual utility functions’ as captured by differences in personality and tastes (Filer, 1986: 423). Earlier research quoted in Filer posits that people choose their role within the division of labour or labour market according to a cost-benefit calculation (explicit or intuitive) of greatest gain over the duration of their anticipated and presumably predictable working career.

Numerous other accounts link work, practice and occupation, on one hand, and learning and the formation of identity and personality on the other. Wenger (1998) describes practice as a process by which we experience the world and our engagement with it as something meaningful. It is a process that can be defined as the pursuit of enterprise and attendant social relations, and is a process of constant learning. Career theory, according to D. T. Hall, defines a person’s career as ‘the individually perceived sequence of attitudes and behaviours associated with work-related experiences and activities over the span of a person’s life’ (see Weick and Berlinger 1989: 313).

At one extreme, we match men and jobs where ‘the optimal career outcomes for both the individual and the organization can best be facilitated through the congruence between the individual’s characteristics and the demands, requirements, and rewards of the organizational environment’ (Betz et al. 1989: 26; see also the discussion of the ‘portfolio career’ in Handy 2001). At the other extreme, ‘career improvization within the self-designing organization’ (Weick and Berlinger 1989: 313) produces the ‘boundaryless’ career in the ‘boundaryless’ organization (Weick 2001: 205-223), where careers and

organizations are co-enacted in ‘a sort of recursive relationship between agency and structure’ (Burgi et al. 2005: 82).

The preceding accounts of practice and careers are indicative of mainstream thinking. That they contain little or no account of the local intersubjective processes that actually occur between people acting in organizational settings is an omission of some importance.

### **Overview of this dissertation**

The work presented in this dissertation took place over three years while I also maintained a full portfolio of activities and engagements. It involved producing a series of four research and writing projects, interspersed with meetings of the entire cohort of students and faculty of the University of Hertfordshire D.Man. programme, and of a learning group (made up of three fellow students, a faculty supervisor, and myself). During these meetings we critiqued and debated the themes and ideas in each other’s work. Each project took the form of a paper that included a reflective narrative of current organizational life experiences, identifying themes relevant to the research topic and conducting research in the relevant literature. Once satisfactorily completed, the paper was added to a portfolio intended to comprise a dissertation, with the addition of a synopsis and concluding remarks.

From one project to the next, inquiry opened up and directions took hold as themes arose and were dealt with in the research process. My first project was a reflection on the influences leading to my current practice; it was then that my intention became to develop a more inclusive account of practice itself. Accordingly, in the second project I took up the theme of practice more explicitly through a narrative account of several activities going on in my life at that time. Reflection on these experiences showed that continual interaction with others was central to my own action, whatever the different settings and purposes at any given time. Although this may seem rather obviously true of any managerial activity, the recognition prompted me to reconsider practice in terms of experiences of seeing, feeling and thinking in organizational settings. Practice develops over time involving interactive processes of engagement in activity itself, and cannot be reduced to visible, public behaviours. It follows that understanding the lived experience of such interactive processes in practical situations may shed new light on practice and the discourse of practice.

In the third project, my narrative concerned a group's attempt to make good on the full potential of a perceived but as yet indefinable real estate development opportunity. My role in the process was as convenor, instigator and conductor. Writing the narrative brought into view the presence of emotions in an interactive context that was not explicitly emotional. I discovered that the issue for practice here was not the personal experience of emotion itself, but rather emotionality – the process of experiencing emotion (Denzin, 1984) as a constitutive aspect of interaction. I sensed a strong link between emotionality and engaging meaningfully in action in the world, where emotionality may be examined for what it can reveal about the quality of engagement itself.

I refer to the ebb and flow of emotionality, due to its relationship to engagement, as the liveliness of group process as experienced by the people involved in a shared undertaking. The emotionality that underlies the liveliness of engagement is necessary for groups grappling with uncertainty (large or small) to move forward. But this same emotionality makes the process fragile, and vulnerable to conflict. Not only is it difficult to achieve a fine balance within any group, but it also seems paradoxical that fragility should be necessary for robust forward movement or innovation. Here a question arises regarding the role of the manager as the one who must often instigate, convene and conduct group processes dealing in uncertainty or novelty, which conversely can produce uncertainty and novelty where none is expected. My active life places me in such situations, where I become a subject of interactional dynamics as embodied experience. When I participate in lively interaction, while seeking to ensure that it remains lively in order for movement to occur, I sense my own engagement and fragility.

The fourth project produced the insight that my experiences of practice had in one way or another always to do with enacting a role or roles in coordinated, organized human activity. Reflecting on the theory of role enactment in view of my lived experience allowed me to notice a problem in how role enactment is accounted for in the theory. Specifically, conventional role theory as presented by Sarbin and Allen (1968) is consistent with the concept of division of labour, in which prescribed roles are assigned in order to complete necessary tasks. By contrast, reflection on experience in organizations and collaborative engagement instead shows that enactment entails complex emotional intersubjective processes.

Given this difference, I explored three distinctly different ways of thinking about the individual and the social, – and by analogy the role and the organization: processes of communicative interaction (Stacey 2003); micro-sociology and chains of micro-interaction rituals (Collins 2004); and the self as a structure in society (Wiley 1994). Stacey's account in particular points to two apparently mutually exclusive ways of thinking about people in organizations: positivist and structuralist (spatial) versus emergent and self-organising (processual).

Both these two seemingly opposed ways of thinking must be taken seriously, as both are present in thought, action and experience at every turn in organizations. Yet the fact that they continue to co-exist suggests that they cannot, practically speaking, be mutually exclusive; rather they are co-present as part and parcel of life in organizations, creating a tension in role enactment. Role enactment, then, is problematized as constraining practitioners to embody the meaning of this tension in moment-by-moment interaction.

In the synopsis of this dissertation I seek more fully to understand role enactment as problematized by reflecting on the practice of managing, referencing the work of Henry Mintzberg as exemplifying the current state of mainstream management thinking. I argue that Mintzberg's account of management practice remains to be completed by a further account of the manager as an actor in settings of sophisticated cooperation. Here, managing can be seen as engagement in the social act, and as such is inherently reflexive and paradoxical (Mead, 1934). I conclude then that the paradox of 'managing sophisticated cooperation' is never definitively resolved but is actually lived in the social interaction of managing.

I end the dissertation with a concluding reflection.

### **Reading this dissertation**

The organization of this document reflects the way my thinking actually developed over the course of the research. Each of the four projects has somewhat of a stand-alone character, though of course they are linked thematically. This presentation is the most transparent and straightforward way for me to present and defend what I regard as my particular contribution. The order of the projects and the unembellished relation of each to the others are important for the reader to appreciate my final position.

The six sections that follow consist of a discussion of methodology, the four projects and finally a synopsis of my thinking. Each section on a project concludes with a brief commentary on its relation to the other projects, and how I think it advances toward a final position. While there is a strong temptation to use these commentaries to make sense of the project retrospectively (Weick, 2001) in the context of the overall thesis (which is apparent now but was not so when the project took place), I have tried to avoid rationalization and self-justification.

The organization of this dissertation has a specific purpose. With the benefit of this introduction as well as the description of the methodology to follow, noting the themes and arguments of each project helps in understanding the subsequent projects. This approach is especially pertinent inasmuch as I do not represent this dissertation in the form of one unitary arc of argument. Its organization reflects a position I hold deeply to the effect that my total contribution is to be found as much in the sum of all that is written here as in any one set of conclusions or synopsis.

Finally, I should point out that the language of this dissertation is expressed in two voices. One voice is analytical – the structured voice of inquiry and argument. The other is the voice of reflective narrative, which yields the themes that become the object of inquiry, reflecting thoughts or inner conversations as they occurred. In these passages, the tone of the text is relatively informal, and personal anecdotes are used to illustrate points; at times the overall effect may be somewhat impressionistic.

But the reader need not expect the two voices always to be radically distinct from each other. All text, insofar as it is the writer's interpretation of his or her own intentions, is rhetorical and requires interpretation by the reader. The interpretive nature of text equally extends to the analytical parts of the dissertation, which are by their very nature argumentative, 'open-palm thinking' rather than 'closed-fisted' problem-solving scientific thinking (Billig 1991:39). As argument, they form a developmental narrative of the thinking process wherein the dialectic of opinion and truth plays itself out so as to arrive at a credible truth claim. Thus the analytic voice may not be radically different from the voice in the narratives, since analysis too is a narrative, albeit of a different kind.

## METHODOLOGY

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The thesis presented in this dissertation is an account of practice that was developed during my research programme as described above. Its argument was formed by pulling together materials and a palette of insights and perspectives either already known to me or which became known as I explored different themes that also appeared during the course of the work. As is most often the case with my practice, I did not proceed with a static vision of the end result in mind from the beginning. My thesis developed through a reflexive dialectic process.

The following description of the methodology employed in my research is organized in five parts: ontology, reflexivity as a methodological approach, 'bricolage' as method of inquiry, narrative writing instead of interrogation of data, and validity and generalisability of my thesis.

### **Ontological position**

The emergent character of my thesis reflects a particular ontological position.

Throughout the research the emphasis has been on organizations and our experiences in organizations as processes of human relating, where persons are looked upon as social beings through and through (Mead 1934; Elias 2001). The individual and the social are considered to be socially constructed facets of the same communicative processes of interaction, where the dualism of 'the individual' and 'the social' is eliminated in favour of groups and individuals dialectically forming and being formed by each other (Elias 2001; Dalal 1998; Burkitt 1991; Stacey et al. 2000). Stacey and Griffin (2005) have termed such processes complex responsive processes of relating, comprising acts of communication, relations of power and the interplay of peoples' choices arising in acts of evaluation.

The regard for organizations and our experience in organizations as processes of human relating represents an ontological shift from the dominant view of organizations as autonomous 'individuals' acting within a positivist, systemic or structuralist conception of social reality. Such a shift to what is a social constructionist ontological position is necessary, given my stated aim to achieve account more fully for the nature of practical experience in organizations than dominant accounts of practice actually do. The dominant

ontology is dualistic with regard to the social and the individual, taking the individual to be an autonomous agent acting upon the world of groupings of other autonomous agents on the basis of privately held frameworks of motives, intentions and values. Maintaining the dualism of the individual and the social would necessarily require a reversion to the notion of practice as being the application of preset capabilities by individuals as preformed autonomous units interacting algorithmically within systems or structures – which is precisely what my work seeks to challenge.

### **Reflexivity as a methodological approach**

The D.Man. is a professional degree. The basis of research is one's own practical experience. In studying experience, two main approaches are possible. One is to separate the knower from the object of study, putting the researcher in the position of an observer who relies on accounts or reports of experience, which then form the object of interpretation. From this objective or outside position, one cannot know what the subject is experiencing, and the knowledge created is somewhat partial. The other approach is to know experience from within (Shotter 1993), joining the knower with the object of study into one knowledge proposal. In the case of my research, there is a direct correlation between myself as the knower – and the object of study – and an account of practice inclusive of my own.

The methodological approach suited to connect subject and object is reflexive research (Alvesson and Sköldberg 2000; Ellis and Bochner 2000; Schön 1991; Steier 1991).

Reflexivity calls on researchers to position themselves within the process of reflection by thinking about how the research is acting back on them and how this in turn is affecting their research: 'There is no one-way street between the researcher and the object of study; rather the two affect each other mutually and continually in the course of the research process' (Alvesson and Sköldberg 2000: 39).

In reflexivity, not only are researchers conscious of their effect on the research process and its reflection upon them, but they are also self-aware, recognising their own presence in the themes and interactions that are the object of study, and incorporating that in the research. Reflexivity thus requires paying attention to the processes of knowledge production, the contexts of those processes, and the involvement of the knowledge producer (Ibid.: 5 – 6). Reflexivity is central to my method of inquiry.



## **‘Bricolage’ as a method of inquiry**

In the case of my research presented in this dissertation, the processes of knowledge production are my practice itself and my reflection on experiences of practice, while I am practicing. It seems logical to me that my research programme would be yet another experience of practice. In other words, I conduct research and create knowledge in very much in the same way as I engage in my everyday active life.

I have described what I do as participating in and often managing fragile emergent coalitions: embarking on endeavours, of course with an agreed direction of travel, but with an uncertain outcome drawing on resources which I typically know already from experience, combining them in processes which are inherently emergent and interactive in nature, towards a goal which becomes defined in process of the very action the group is undertaking. Moreover, I appropriate new and widely varied knowledge, practices and materials within each experience, and these too affect the direction and the outcome of the experience itself. As the group proceeds, progress is evaluated explicitly or implicitly according to the situation. As milestones are reached, often only recognizable as such once they are in view, each one in its turn adds to the result still emerging, which can only be recognized fully in hindsight at any given point. Some call this way of going about getting things done ‘muddling through’, creating ‘self-fulfilling prophecies’ (Vail 1991; Weick 1995), or ‘emergent strategies’ (Mintzberg et al. 1998); but I experience it as something altogether more complex and substantive.

My work in this programme progressed as a series of successive engagements in the form of projects. Within each project and from one project to the next, avenues of inquiry opened up in the course of the project, instigated by the writing of a narrative in some instances, and in others by exploring themes in the literature I was reading at that time. I could not have considered these avenues until reading and putting ideas on paper in the first place, having them scrutinized by faculty and learning group colleagues, debating, reflecting, self-reflecting and re-reflecting continuously, and then trying out new or alternative ways of seeing and arguing. The work became about developing elements which together would either constitute the account of practice I was seeking to create, or at least point to further avenues of inquiry.

As I moved through each project cycle, writing narratives on current ordinary practical experience called up themes. These themes led to conversations with colleagues and

professors as well as to selected readings that augmented other basic literature on interactive processes and systems theory. Reading entire works in depth to understand whole arguments made known to me similarities as well as differences among theorists writing on the same subjects or interpreting the same theorists, providing insights which later became useful because they were known. Writing about the more significant of these works within the dissertation then became an exercise in reflexive reading, in that the writing about whole arguments brought into view themes and linkages that led in new directions and which I may have glossed over otherwise.

Once committed to my portfolio, each paper captures the intense, reflexive process of investigation and discovery, the identification and deliberate formulation of insights adding to, rounding out and possibly contradicting the account up to that point. Each project adds to an edifice of knowledge emerging over time. But this edifice does not have a fixed end state realising some utilitarian purpose; and there is a constant risk that it may become unstable with the addition of a new piece – or end up serving no purpose whatsoever. Finally, because each project reflects a process of research and discovery and is not a mere compilation of findings, it may contain information, insights and other material that may become useful only later on, rather than within the particular project.

I call this method of inquiry ‘bricolage’, a term I have adapted from Lévi-Strauss. The ‘bricoleur’ is one who puts to use instruments, materials and practices ‘not known as a result of their usefulness; they are deemed to be useful or interesting because they are first of all known’ (Lévi-Strauss 1967: 9).

The ‘bricoleur’ is adept at performing a large number of diverse tasks; but unlike the engineer, he does not subordinate each of them to the availability of raw materials and tools conceived and procured for the purpose of the project. His universe of instruments is closed and the rules of his game are always to make do with ‘whatever is at hand’, that is to say with a set of tools which is always finite and is also heterogeneous because what it contains bears no relation to the current project. . . . The set of the ‘bricoleur’s’ means cannot therefore be defined in terms of a project. (Ibid.: 17–19).

The bricoleur may be a problem-solving do-it-yourself make-doer, like Harper’s character Willie, who builds a sort-of operating tractor from left-over bits of metal,

lawnmower parts and other scrap lying around in his yard, most of which was never intended to be put to use mowing a lawn (Harper 1987). Willie is capable of such an endeavour because he knows what a tractor is, has all the necessary knowledge of how one works, has a wide variety of tools and is quite handy. Notice that Willie may not be trying to find a new way to mow a lawn, but is being very innovative and practical in his use of existing materials to create an object that will do the job. Of course this does not preclude Willie from inventing or making discoveries along the way.

Lévi-Strauss also points to a middle ground between the scientist and the bricoleur: that of the artist who is 'both something of a scientist and a bricoleur'. By his craftsmanship he constructs a material object which 'is also an object of knowledge' (Lévi-Strauss 1967: 22). For example, the artist as painter 'is always mid-way between design and anecdote, and his genius consists of uniting internal and external knowledge, a 'being' and a 'becoming', in producing with his brush an object which does not exist as such and which he is nevertheless able to create on his canvas' (Ibid.: 25). The result – a painting, a sculpture, a song – once recognized by others, is an object of knowledge.

Within the worldview of the bricoleur (and Lévi-Strauss's artist), experience has priority as a way of knowing. The bricoleur knows because he or she acts and has acted. Active life is pursued through the use of instruments, materials at hand and practices appropriated through experience, often in innovative and creative ways. As engagements occur and progress, more instruments, materials and practices are developed and appropriated, still without a specific project or utility in mind, but which can be later put to use in novel combinations and increasingly complex purposive situations. (On the creative use of social practices see also Bourdieu 1977.)

Denzin and Lincoln point to another important characteristic of the bricoleur: an ability, when considering a problem, to shift between or combine several different perspectives without being intransigently tied to any one. The theoretical bricoleur 'reads widely and is knowledgeable about many different interpretive paradigms . . . that can be brought to any particular problem. He or she may not, however, feel that paradigms can be mingled or synthesized. That is one cannot easily move between paradigms as overarching philosophical systems denoting ontologies, epistemologies and methodologies. They represent belief systems that attach users to particular worldviews. Perspectives, in contrast, are less developed systems and one can more easily move between them. The

researcher-as-*bricoleur*-theorist works between and within competing and overlapping perspectives and paradigms' (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000: 6).

### **Narrative writing instead of interrogation of data**

Given bricolage as a method of inquiry, what becomes of the interrogation of data as a component of the research process? Reflexivity, as we have seen, shifts the very nature of data interrogation from the qualitative interpretation of texts or accounts of experiences looked upon objectively, in favour of a reflexive process of examining experience from within.

Consider, for example, a research experiment conducted by Schön and Bamberger (1991). The object of the experiment was to observe two subjects attempting, without speaking to each other, to create a tune with five bells, all visibly identical but each having a different sound. During the experiment the researchers observed their subjects through a two-way mirror, noted their observations and then interpreted what they had seen in order to theorize as to the processes the subjects must have been following to achieve the observed results. In a reflexive approach, by contrast, the researchers themselves would have gotten on the other side of the mirror, as it were, and engaged in the activity themselves. They could then have taken their own experience seriously (Stacey and Griffin, 2005), examining it for themes and insights relating to lived experience from which theories could then be developed and explored. Such a reflexive approach offers a type of access to experience which in an objectivist, empirical paradigm of inquiry can only be attempted through interpretation of the researchers' observations and perhaps accounts by the subjects themselves.

Nonetheless, in order for a reflexive and experiential method to work in practice, experience must be brought into view and subjected to inquiry. This entails the writing of reflexive narrative accounts of personal interactive experiences, wherein one's self necessarily also appears and becomes an object of one's own examination by the act of writing and reflecting on the account.

A narrative is 'a symbolic representation of a sequence of events connected by subject matter and related by time; any set of events that can be sequenced and related can be narrated' (Weick 1995: 128 ). Furthermore, narrative, in the words of Paul Ricoeur , is

more than 'simply adding episodes to one another; it also constructs meaningful totalities out of scattered events' (see Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2000: 93).

Weick (1995) suggests that we notice events or occasions because of their meaning to us in our memory of them. Denzin, on the other hand, stresses the 'epiphanies' represented by problematic interactions, which 'alter how persons define themselves and their relations with others. In these moments, persons reveal personal character. . . . Epiphanies open up the world to interpretation' (Denzin 1989: 14–17). It is true that epiphanies and memorable, noticeable interactions have the benefit of making the dynamics of events more acutely visible and probably easier to articulate. All this, however, is not a sufficient reason to write about an experience, unless that experience pertains to the usual course of practice and thus is relevant to the overall research endeavour. Moreover, given bricolage as my method of inquiry, the experiences that should be accepted are those that lie ready to hand; they should not be sought after selectively, or experimentally contrived.

In the research presented here, the narratives portray everyday interactive experiences, which are explicit and ordinary, and which yield up themes which then become objects of reflection in the course of research and writing. Reflection on the narratives and the identification of themes forming the object of research and argumentation signify that these narratives are not 'raw data' to be analysed or interpreted as would be the case in objectivist research methodologies. Instead it is the very process of writing, as well as reflecting on the experiences involved and the narratives themselves, that points to themes and targets for further inquiry.

The personal nature of these narratives caused me to notice, in the course of writing, that a fork in the research path presented itself on several occasions: one branch leading towards introspective self-analysis (why was some particular theme or another important to *me*?), the other leading to a reflection as to the meaning of such themes to my research topic. I consistently chose the latter route.

For example, in my third project, the theme that emerged from my reflection concerned the emotional reaction I experienced in one particular meeting. This reaction may have been due to my sensing, in the moment, a lack of recognition of my role and contribution. From this insight, I could have explored the theme of recognition, potentially leading to

inquiry into questions of identity and survival. But the fact that such recognition is an important issue for me personally was not relevant to my developing an alternative account of practice in organizations. Instead, I was drawn to explore the role of emotionality in maintaining engagement in group interaction as fundamental to practice. My method thus distinguishes between reflexivity and self-analysis.

Finally, the content of any narrative or story necessarily recounts what we notice retrospectively within a period of time intentionally bracketed out of a flow of experience without beginning or end (Weick 1995). There is therefore a danger of resorting to sensemaking, by choosing theories and themes for purposes of self-justification or rationalization of past experience (Weick 2001). Is my doctoral work about sensemaking, retrospective self-justification or rationalization? I would argue that it is not. First, I believe I avoided a sensemaking pitfall by choosing not to be self-analytical. Second, the reflexive nature of the examination of chosen experience is intended to identify themes which form the object of further research and reflection, looking forward (not backward) towards developing an argument in defence of a position to be recognized as generalisable knowledge. It may also make sense retrospectively, but sensemaking is not its purpose.

### **Validity and generalisability**

Having pointed to reflexivity as my methodological approach, described and named my method of inquiry as bricolage, and explained the use of reflexive narratives, what sort of account of practice do I then expect to produce? My account is not a unitary arc of argumentation attempting to prove a theory; rather it is the outcome of a process of bricolage: a solid-enough edifice, apt to receive future additions. The value and success of the outcome can only be evaluated after the fact. A less-than-positive outcome is certainly a possibility, though this need not disqualify the work done, as long as there is due reflection on the reasons for such an outcome. Not all research is guaranteed successful results, especially when ‘there are no self-evident, simple or unambiguous rules or procedures, and that crucial ingredients are...judgement, intuition, ability to “see and point something out”’ (Alvesson and Sköldberg 2000: 248). Evidently, then, evaluation and judgment have a place within my research process. It remains finally to ask: how does the qualitative and reflexive nature of my research methodology, which

eliminates the objectivity of subject-object dualism, warrant validity and generalisability of the research?

Ellis and Bochner (2000) deal with questions of validity and generalisability. In reference to her own practice of autoethnography, defined as the *reflexive* study of one's own group or culture (Denzin 1989; italics are mine), and particularly the use of personal narratives, Ellis writes:

It depends on your definition of validity. I start from the position that language is not transparent and there's no single standard of truth. To me validity means that our work seeks verisimilitude . . . it evokes in readers a feeling that experience described is lifelike, believable, and possible. (Ellis and Bochner 2000: 751)

Any attempt to produce a demonstrably true representation of a reality is unachievable within the paradigm of reality as constructed, and the lack of such correspondence does not invalidate the research. Accordingly, because it is my own experience that constitutes the empirical basis of my research, validity would be warranted if I am really doing what I say I am doing in my active and interactive life with others, and if there is verisimilitude in my narratives – what Lather (1993) calls 'a world we already seem to know'. A further warrant of validity is achieved through the conversational encounters which take place in learning group meetings and with faculty, where it may be argued we achieve a high degree of what Alvesson and Sköldberg, citing Habermas, refer to as 'communicative rationality':

Communicative rationality . . . denotes a way of responding to (questioning, testing in conversation, and possibly accepting) the validity claims of various statements. A high level of communicative rationality thus signifies that perceptions are being based upon statements which are intelligible, that the statements reflect honesty and sincerity, that the statements are true or correct and that they accord with the prevailing norms. (Anderson and Sköldberg 2000: 118-119)

Habermas (1984) also maintains that validity of a truth claim obtains according to rationally motivated agreement, which flows from clear, rational argument, over competitive validity claims, recognized among the participants as being criticisable. In other words, here we have people of a particular hermeneutic community (in this case

management thinkers) who share a definition of a situation and who (given what we think we know) pursue a manner of argumentation that entails the push-and-pull of sometimes competing criticisable knowledge claims. Validity of the truth or knowledge claim then obtains upon the reaching of an agreement that it does so.

Through the doctoral programme of study, class members and faculty spent much of our time together examining the argumentability and criticisability of the respective validity claims we were making. We were engaged continually with each other in processes of interaction and exchange, requiring agreement on a shared definition of our situation as co-participants in the programme and in our smaller learning group regarding each others' work. Like Habermas (1984), I believe that these lived processes within the doctoral programme add support to a valid claim to be making a contribution to knowledge.

Finally, there is the question of generalisability. There seem to be two orders of generalisability. The first is the generalisability of one's personal account of experience, and this is covered by Ellis:

Our lives are particular, but they are also typical and generalisable, since we all participate in a limited number of cultures and institutions. We want to convey both in our stories. A story's generalizability is constantly being tested by readers as they determine if it speaks to their experience or about the lives of others they know. (Ellis and Bochner 2000: 751)

The second order of generalisability refers to the research results themselves, and is to be found in the very form the research takes. Alvesson and Sköldbörg posit three aspects of research dealing with the form of research: creativity, links to other research, and presentation and argumentation. In their view, creativity is triggered by the fusion of seemingly disparate phenomena joined together into one knowledge proposal. By being acquainted with material from several essentially different fields, and by undertaking 'many pronged readings of existing research, which would include not only criticism but also attempts at finding new and fruitful facets' (Alvesson and Sköldbörg 2000: 252), research taps into the 'social fund of knowledge' (Elias 1987b). The need to engage in empirical studies in order to make an interesting contribution to knowledge is thus obviated. From there on, if the presentation and argumentation avoid the pitfalls of pure



rhetoric and solipsism, and are conversationally vetted as suggested by Habermas's (1984) theory of argumentation, then it would be safe to say that generalisability would obtain. I believe that my research meets these requirements.



## **PROJECT ONE:**

### **A REFLECTIVE NARRATIVE ON PRACTICE**

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The little girl had the making of a poet in her who,  
being told to be sure of her meaning before she spoke, said:  
‘How can I know what I think until I see what I say?’

– Graham Wallas

#### **Introduction**

This paper, as the first of four sequential projects forming the body of my dissertation, was intended to begin reflection on themes that were to become the object of inquiry in subsequent reading, large and small group discussions, and projects. For me it represented a beginning of consciousness regarding the significance of the reflexive nature of the programme. At the beginning of the paper, there is an early reflection on the use of narrative writing in the context of the D.Man. program, which has also been discussed in the preceding section on methodology.

#### **Understanding the starting point**

In writing this paper, I feel I have embarked on an exercise in emergent self-awareness. I am reminded of the little girl quoted in the epigraph, except that for me it would say: ‘How can I know what I think until I see what I *write*?’

In the course instructions, the problem statement for this first project of the D.Man. programme read as follows:

*[Write a] reflective narrative weaving together the influences and experiences that inform your current practice in organizations.*

*This should show how the questions that are beginning to shape your enquiry have emerged in your life and work and how you are beginning to think about and illustrate these in light of your experience in the programme.*

As in most problem statements, this one required some unpacking before pushing ahead with text that would risk rambling on in search of a productive course. The unpacking

exercise was useful. It singled out some key concepts that were embedded in the statement of the problem and needed some consideration before commencing writing.

First of all, this paper is to be *reflective*. In research, the terms ‘reflective’ and ‘reflexive’ are often used more or less synonymously, with ‘reflexive’ connoting a particular, specified instance of reflection (Alvesson and Skoldberg 2000: 5–6). For the purposes of my work, ‘reflective’ may denote showing ourselves to ourselves, and ‘reflexive’ may denote our being conscious of ourselves as we are seeing ourselves (Steier 1991). This paper sets out to do both.

Second, it is to be a *narrative*: ‘a symbolic representation of a sequence of events connected by subject matter and related by time; any set of events that can be sequenced and related can be narrated (Weick 1995: 128). A narrative consists of more than simply adding episodes to one another; it also constructs meaningful totalities out of scattered events, as a sequence of episodes and a significant configuration of these episodes (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2000:93).

As a ‘reflective narrative’ therefore, this paper sets out to be a personal account of experiences arranged in a meaningful configuration, in which I take account of my action and interaction with others, while remaining conscious of my thinking in the writing of the account.

Third, it engages the notion of *practice in organizations*. For me, this notion proved to be provocative, because I am unable to say just what my own practice is. While I can describe factually what it is that I do on any given day, it is not clear how this constitutes my *practice*. Wenger (1998) describes practice as a process by which we experience the world and our engagement with it as something meaningful. For Wenger, practice is a process that can be defined as the pursuit of enterprise and attendant social relations, and is a process of constant learning. This description is helpful to some degree, but I sense that I will have to discover first hand just what practice actually means to me. So this paper is necessarily one of discovery – of making some sense of what I do in terms of practice. By ‘discovery’ I mean the detection of how my practice has been constructed over my working life and of what specifically does it consist.

A talk given by faculty member Professor Patricia Shaw during the first residential module of the programme, opened up a plausible approach to writing this paper. In her

talk, Shaw demonstrated the use of narrative to explain to people what she actually does as an organizational consultant. Insisting on how typically the use of shorthand references to professions, roles or titles are reductive to the meaning of her practice, she maintained that she can only convey effectively what she actually does by telling stories – putting it into a narrative as it were. Listening to Shaw's account of this approach in action, I found an insight I needed to get started; reading her book, *Changing Conversations in Organizations* (2002), I was able to see more fully how she uses narrative as a methodology to advance her thesis that change in organizations occurs within day-to-day conversations. My approach to doing this project therefore has been to recount life experiences in narrative form, and in the process spot cues as to what I should investigate further.

A narrative approach of course presents some difficulties. Every lived experience necessarily entails an ongoing history; yet only rarely can such a history be framed with a 'beginning' and an 'end'. Typically, each experience arises, occurs and carries forward in the flow of life at the time. Nor is a given experience 'about' just one thing; all strands of my life are present in every experience at every moment. When we consider our experience in private, these difficulties do not appear to be great and our thought seems to flow easily. It is the *writing* about experience which proves to be challenging, because our account must always be drastically simplified in order to be comprehensible and be taken seriously by others.

In order to construct the following account, therefore, I did much as Weick (1995) describes in his account of the process of making sense. I 'noticed' experiences because of emotions that they aroused at the time they occurred and still do in the thinking of them. As Weick suggests, it became clear as I proceeded that such experiences must be singled out of a continuum of life composed of overlapping and intermingling experiences, which do not have a beginning or an end but must be framed as if they did in order for us to understand and discuss them in everyday language. There was therefore a risk that my account would be reduced to simplistic forms of linear occurrence, losing much of the true complexity of lived experience in the process. The only way to deal with this was to reflect on my account as it was developing and at the end of it.

The following narrative contains a number of stories of experiences from my life and work, which together I will often refer to as my 'active life'. In writing it, as I singled out

noticeable experiences chronologically, I imagined them fitting into a story pattern: a call, struggles, transformation and return. This seems to be a particularly useful way to view certain types of experiences as well as to present the information in some comprehensible form, because it takes ‘a sequence of episodes’ and places them in a ‘significant configuration’. It goes beyond ‘adding episodes to one another; it also constructs a meaningful totality out of scattered events’ in the form of an account of life (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2000:93). The resulting totality can then be explored for its own meanings, and inasmuch as it reflects my practice, will allow me to make some sense of it. Therefore I have chosen to organize my account in this way.

### **The call to practice**

I have been trained as a professional architect. This in itself explains little, since I had chosen architecture in the beginning solely as an interesting field to study if I was going to go to university at all. In fact, I only practiced architecture as such for a few years after graduation, before moving, in my late twenties, into the broader field of real estate work.

When the move into real estate actually took place, I was very involved with the Montreal downtown Sports and Community Centre. I was active as a volunteer physical education instructor, and I also did some committee work. As a result of my involvement, I was invited to sit on a committee to oversee the renovation of the physical education facilities of the branch. Also on this committee was a person whom I shall call ‘Mark’, who was about ten years older than I was (I was then in my late twenties). Mark had founded his own real-estate company (specializing in office leasing), and was making his mark as a leader in the Montreal business community.

One morning after a committee meeting, Mark gave me a lift to my office. On the way, in the course of our conversation I mentioned to him that I was unhappy with my current situation at work. Mark immediately said: ‘Look, I have all kinds of corporate property owners asking me what they should do with their properties. I often don’t know how to respond, so I could certainly use some help. Why don’t you come over and work with me?’ An hour and a half later, I had left architecture and was in the business of real estate consulting.

As it turned out, this was a true beginning. In retrospect, I can see a clear line of demarcation between the work I had been doing before and what I would be doing from that point onwards. Suddenly, a new notion of practice took root.

But what made me jump as I did? In hindsight it all appears a little rash. Although I was discontented in my work as an architect, there were many other options yet to explore within the world of architecture and there was nothing in the moment to provoke me other than Mark's invitation. Yet I do not remember spending more than a passing moment in deep reflection. It would be easy now to rationalize: more money (but not that much more); greater responsibility (but not really that, either); why be a mediocre architect when I could be an excellent 'something else' (but what)? I know now that at that moment I was searching for a new path. I needed a call, and even though what I felt called to move towards was ill-defined, there was enough substance in Mark's invitation and in my situation at the time to move me to act.

### **The struggles of practice**

My experience with Mark provided me with my first exposure to the Montreal real estate field: its practices, actors, processes and drivers. Modern real estate, like many other fields, demands technical specializations which may become life-long careers for its practitioners, as loans officers, brokers, asset managers or project managers. For my part, I chose not to become involved in any particular specialization, however financially tempting it may have appeared, and headed down a different path. Just what this path is resists simple description; it is a path of many different facets and pursuits intermingled over time. Not a profession *per se*, nor a position or positions held, not even a circumscribed role inhabited over the long term, this path emerged from many different struggles, constantly searching for and being open to opportunities for new challenges in a variety of areas at the same time – all leading towards a living practice, or active life as I term it.

The following stories of lived experience of struggle demonstrate the diversity and breadth of this active life and expose the nature of my action in some detail. The experiences I have chosen to write about reflect three strands or areas of recurrent action: *urban development*, *advocacy* and *governance*. In the living of each experience, all three strands were likely present at the same time, in forms and in complex relations one with the other that are not easily discernable. If these stories appear somewhat anecdotal, that

is due to my intent to include enough ‘thick description’ (Denzin, 1989) for this complexity to become visible to me as I write and to be sensible to the reader. Writing this sort of ‘thick description’, in fact, was a reflexive experience in itself.

### Action in urban development

In 1986, just after I had run for election as a city councillor<sup>1</sup> and was working as an independent real estate consultant, a historic church in downtown Montreal burned to the ground, killing two firemen in the process. This church was unique in Montreal society: an architectural jewel in what we call the ‘Golden Square Mile’ of manor homes, a welcome centre for political refugees and Viet Nam War draft dodgers in the ‘70s, and the home of a socially progressive congregation. The Members of the congregation, deeply shocked at the loss of lives and of their spiritual and cultural home, immediately undertook to rebuild the church. At that time, the chair of the congregation – I shall call her ‘Nancy’ – was referred to me by a close friend whose services she had wanted to retain. Nancy invited me to meet the reconstruction committee (of which Nancy was also the chair) to see if I might be able to help them. After some discussion with her and her colleagues from the congregation, we decided to work together.

It was clear from the outset that the choices before the congregation were limited. There was not enough money to rebuild a new stand-alone church; the congregation would have to move elsewhere, or find some other solution to rebuild on the site. Since moving was seen as a last resort, redevelopment proposals were invited over the following months from local developers to build a development project on the site (condominium apartments, office space), with meeting spaces and offices for the congregation within the same complex. A tentative agreement was reached with a developer, and a request for approvals was sent into the City. It looked at that point as though we were on a clear path to success.

But there was vociferous opposition from the church’s neighbours, who considered the project too big for their liking. In the face of this controversy, the City declined our request. We were stopped dead in our tracks, and there was nothing else to be done. The church property could not be sold because the downtown real estate market had gone

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<sup>1</sup>I ran as a candidate in the downtown riding where I live. It was an exciting campaign, but in the end I lost to the incumbent by a very narrow margin.



‘soft’; so all the congregation could do was bide its time, keep an eye open for opportunities for sale or redevelopment, and continue meeting in the vestiges of the original building that were still serviceable – however makeshift that actually was.

At around the time when these events occurred, I had taken an interesting and well-paying job with a national railway to manage development of its excess land holdings, and I was no longer in the business of independent real estate consulting. But my professional relationship with Nancy, the congregation’s minister ‘Reverend Ray’ and the members of the committee had by that point developed into friendship. Over the next six years, I continued to participate in committee meetings as a friend of the congregation, voluntary redevelopment advisor and as an unofficial member of their committee. During that time, we looked at different ideas, alternatives and proposals that showed up, shared our thoughts about how a new church might function and waited.

Then a chance to construct a future for the church appeared out of nowhere. A foreign buyer arrived on the scene, offering a ridiculously low price to purchase the ruined church property outright for cash. At first, his proposal seemed too low to even consider; Nancy said that the committee was of a mind to reject it outright.

I thought about that and asked her: ‘Are you in the church business or the real estate business? If what you want to do is capitalize on the full value of your real estate asset, then you’ll have to wait a lot longer to get the price you want. In the meantime, carrying on in this temporary situation is wearing down the congregation, and you might be in danger of losing your church in order to keep your asset. On the other hand, if all you want out of this asset is enough money to be able to relocate your church into an acceptable location, maybe there is something that can be done with the amount of money he is offering. Don’t we owe it to ourselves to take a hard look?’

Nancy was nervous. ‘This wasn’t the plan,’ she said. ‘What if it doesn’t work? Don’t we have to wait until we get our price, and then build a project, with no risk? The church can’t sustain any risk.’ Reverend Ray saw it differently: ‘What if there never is an ideal solution? There is no such thing as no risk. Does that mean the church will never do anything? What does that say about the future of this congregation? I think,’ he said, ‘that we must look closely at just what we can put together and see if it can work.’ After further discussion, we agreed that we could build a basic, simple church structure in a

good location with the amount of the offer combined with the congregation's other assets remaining from the fire insurance settlement. But the money for interior finishings, furniture, and landscaping would have to come from somewhere else. The committee came up with the idea to supplement the budget with a little fundraising effort within the congregation. We talked to the congregation about this, and they decided that it was worth the risk.

Of course we could not accept the buyer's offer without making a counter-offer. On the appointed day, we told him that the cost of rebuilding so as to meet the church's needs exceeded his offer by a half a million dollars. We told him how much we thought the property was really worth, and asked him to improve his offer. Without batting an eye, he promptly got up and walked out of the room in a dramatic refusal. His local partner ran after him, and after some visibly lively discussion between them they came back into the room. The local partner topped up their offer by a token amount. We caucused, decided that after all it was now or never, and accepted the offer.

By this time I was once again without a formal job, but up to then, I had still been acting on a volunteer basis. When the question came up as to how the church was actually to manage the project through to completion, the role was offered to me with remuneration, and I accepted. From there on, the process became one of 'making it work', and everyone pitched in always most constructively – the committee, the congregation Board and the various consultants. The project was completed on time, at about one per cent below budget, and the new building was quite beautiful in spite of the limited resources available to build it. And so, one Saturday morning, ten years after the tragic fire, I joined the congregation members and their families, friends and supporters, as we marched joyously from the ruins of the beloved old church to the soon-to-be-beloved new one, where we held an inaugural ceremony including a tearful commemoration of the two firemen who had died trying to save the building.

For me, my involvement in this project with these people was not merely a job or contract that was now coming to an end. It was a passage marked by achievement, mutual memorable growth and friendship. In fact, in the years that followed Reverend Ray officiated at the naming of two of my children, and I was invited to attend and speak at Nancy's wedding.

This ten-year episode, in all its complexity, engaged me personally, intellectually and socially. It was a continuously fruitful application of whatever technical skills I had mastered by that time in my life. It was a socially worthy endeavour. Although it took place over a long period of time, my sense of involvement and commitment grew in spite of interruptions and changes in leadership (Ray retired, Nancy was no longer chair, and she got married, I had two more children and changed job). It created lasting friendships. And I could go on.

If I reflect on this episode in light of the call I described earlier, I can see that there is a larger meaning, which took root at the moment when we made the decision to go ahead with the project. There had certainly been alternatives to this decision: hold out for a better offer for the property; wait until circumstances combined so as to produce an ideal solution – or simply procrastinate. But the ability we shared at that moment, as the main actors in the story, to perceive the situation in the same light, made it possible to act. When the choice was made explicit – real estate or church? – it must have had meaning in our shared reality at that point: our journey together thus far, our present lived situation and our anticipated future. Thus it became possible to envisage a course of action towards a solution that everyone would share responsibility for and champion to the end.

### Action in advocacy

Another strand in my experience is a long-term involvement in representation, or advocacy as some would call it. The following is an example.

In 1986, a new municipal administration in Montreal had made it clear that it was going to change the way urban planning was to be done in the city. Faced with the uncertainty such a change represented, several important players in the non-residential real property industry (owners and developers of shopping centres, office buildings and industrial parks), who were all fierce competitors among themselves, decided to organize in order to have influence on the upcoming legislative process. Among them were several people I knew from my past activities in real estate.

Through various connections, I was invited to join the group, which I accepted to do. By this time it had already been decided that the preferred approach was to found an organization in the form of a non-profit association dedicated to representing the interests of the industry in public policy debates. This organization, which I shall call ‘the

Association', was officially launched in 1987. As one of its founders, I sat on its executive committee and served as one of four vice-presidents.

The first action of the Association was to engage in the public debate over the new Official Plan for downtown Montreal. As a volunteer (my work at the time was developing property for a railway company) I took charge of preparing the brief that the Association would submit during the public consultations to be held on a draft of the plan prior to its adoption by the municipality. It was an exciting time. Our brief was recognized widely as being thoughtful, constructive and responsibly written, and it ultimately had a dramatic impact on the final form of the plan.

With the benefit of this strong start, the Association grew both financially and in influence. We were often consulted by government in the drafting of policy, we were present in the news media and we continued to participate very actively in important public debates.

One such debate concerned a bill introduced by the Government of Quebec, allowing municipalities to levy a surtax on non-residential properties as a new source of revenue to finance public transportation. The targets of this new measure would be none other than the members of the Association themselves. Given my experience with the Official Plan, I was once again asked to lead our representations against some of the more punitive provisions in the law. We presented our position before a committee of the Quebec National Assembly. We made a small gain in the process, though the major irritants remained in the end.

However, issues of this sort never really just go away. Our members were intent on having the law improved, and so we continued our representations in earnest. As time wore on, we came to realize that quick policy victories do not happen in a democracy. We had to toil away persistently over long periods of time, amongst a broad range of stakeholders, winning and losing little battles through several different government mandates and economic cycles. Along the way, I was able to develop strong working relationships with senior elected and staff officials in municipal and provincial governments. Ultimately I ended up serving as the Association's elected president and chair of the board for four years until I left the organization in 1995 at the end of my mandate.

One year later, after the departure of the Association's previous executive director, at a time when I was working at a real-estate industry job that was not likely to last much longer, I was asked by my former board colleagues to take over the Association as its first paid full-time president and chief executive officer. While the move from volunteer leader to paid staff member reporting to my former colleagues within the same organization seemed potentially problematical, I felt that it was feasible, given my knowledge of the issues and the of functioning of the organization. Then a troubling question dawned on me. Here I was now, fighting for the real estate industry as a hired hand; would I now lose the legitimacy I had possessed as a volunteer leader and practicing property developer speaking on behalf of his own industry? What had I become? A lobbyist? And if the industry now had a paid spokesperson instead of relying on the voices of its volunteer leaders, would its credibility be diminished?

I suppose it could have been; but I do not think it turned out that way.

For instance, the battle over the municipal surtaxes continued throughout my tenure as CEO. But it took a giant step towards a resolution when I was able to convince my board of directors and committees to accept the burdensome *levels* of taxation as a negotiating position in order to obtain fairer *rules* of taxation, which I believed would go a long way to solving their problems. A proposal to this effect was put forward during a broad public review of municipal financing. This proposal gained considerable support, and parts of it were written into the law. This was a real achievement for the Association. It positioned us more solidly than ever as a worthy contributor to open public debate. It also demonstrated the considerable capacity we had developed over the years to reflect together, make difficult decisions and then coalesce and act on specific constructive proposals.

As a way of thinking and acting, I realize now that coming to be able to reflect together then act together was in fact the co-construction of the discourse of the organization among the participants. The result was concrete, effective commitment to joint action among ferocious competitors who were not normally inclined to agree on any given issue. There was also a transformative effect: as people continued to participate, they came to value the discourse themselves, and this became shared among the membership who continued to support the Association and its actions.

As the Association's *de facto* lead thinker at the outset, and then as its CEO, my role was central to this movement. In moving from the first role to the second, my voice did not diminish as I had feared. I did not have to change my voice to that of a shrill, combative firebrand for the interests of my employer. It remained the *same* voice, just coming from a different position; paid chief executive versus volunteer leader. It reflected the same values, knowledge and leadership interests that characterized me all along; but I had managed unconsciously to adapt these to my new role and adapt the role, and indeed the entire organization, to my perspective. I take solace in this realization. It seems significant to my action in the world more generally.

### Action in governance

A third and final strand of experience and influence began very long ago with the intention to become fit after eight years of a particularly sedentary university education in architecture, and continued through a long series of leadership roles in non-profit organizations.

After university, I decided to get into shape and so I joined the 'Sports and Community Centre' mentioned above, which is the downtown branch of a city-wide sports and community organization. My physical conditioning consisted mostly of participating in fitness classes given by volunteer instructors. After participating long enough and often enough to be in good condition, I was asked to lead a few classes myself. I had already been interested in doing so, and said I would. Thus began a deep involvement with the organization city-wide.

As a volunteer instructor, I was invited to sit on advisory committees overseeing the functioning of the physical education department. I quite enjoyed this activity; I suppose because I felt useful to the organization, was able to participate in decision making and had opportunities to cultivate a broad range of social contacts. It was not long before I was asked to chair this committee and to sit on the downtown branch's board of directors. When that led to chairing the branch's Board, I became automatically a member of the city-wide corporate board and sat on its executive committee.

This level of involvement continued until 1985, and led to participating in organizational strategic planning exercises, chairing organization-wide committees, participating in national and international conferences and interacting with a broad section of the

Montreal social and political community. Above all, I found myself cast into leadership roles and duties that I could not otherwise experience in my working life, and about which I quickly became passionate.

Over time I became so deeply involved in the organization that I found it was competing with my job for my attention. I was to be found everywhere, always made myself available and got involved wherever and whenever I could. I began wanting to work for the organization. Then it got to be too much; the corporate leadership felt that I was interfering far too much. Ultimately a crisis erupted between me and the organization's leadership on the issue that my influence on staff and volunteers alike was becoming quite negative. This crisis led to my complete separation from the organization itself, which interrupted my physical conditioning activities and left a large void in my life. I felt disengaged – out on the street, lonely, and quite worthless.

This particular outcome raises a question: what is it about this type of activity that creates such involvement; that is so captivating that even though one is only a volunteer, one gets in deeper and deeper, one cannot let it go? How is it that we accept the same degree of stress (if not more) in these volunteer roles than we normally tolerate in our personal and working lives?

Here is another example of such a stressful volunteer experience.

Trying to come back from my painful separation from Sports and Community Centre, I decided that it would be interesting to try electoral politics in the imminent city-wide election. As my choice for campaign manager, I recruited a community development worker whom I had known during my time at the Centre, but who was now the Quebec regional director for an international children's organization.<sup>2</sup> Once the campaign was behind us, she told me that her organization had kept a position open on its national board of directors for a member from Quebec, and that she thought that I would be an ideal candidate. My name was put forward, and I was elected to the board in the fall of 1987. I served on the board for eight years, including two as national chairperson of the organization.

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<sup>2</sup> This is an international cooperation and development nongovernmental organization working in ten countries within an international alliance of ten similar organizations.

While I was vice-chair of the board, we decided to terminate the national executive director and search for a stronger leader. I led the search and recruitment process as we scoured the country for a new executive director with the high abilities and competencies we needed. After what seemed like a thorough process, complete with committee structures, search consultants and national advertising, we found a remarkable candidate whom we presented to the board and staff as our next great leader. I shall call her 'Doreen'. (I should add that while the recruitment process was still under way, I became national chairperson.)

Four months later – I remember the day clearly: it was exactly 120 days after Doreen took up her post – I was calmly working in my office in Montreal when a call came in from the marketing director, who reported directly to Doreen. He was calling to say that he and his colleagues were convinced Doreen had to go: there was no fit possible. Crestfallen, I headed to Toronto to take stock the situation.

When I arrived, the mood in the office was more than grim. I met with Doreen and with every staff member individually, to get a feel for the situation first hand. The staff complained openly to me about Doreen's tyrannical management style and her inability to listen to any feedback they tried to give her. They also suggested that she was making bad decisions. I presented this information to Doreen, who professed to understand how the staff could feel this way and promised to try to improve. I then facilitated an encounter between the staff and Doreen, and obtained everyone's agreement that they would try to work together. I returned to Montreal at the end of the day, hopeful that the problem would now resolve itself.

My hope lasted for about as long as it took me to get back home. The next thing I knew, we had a full-blown staff revolt on our hands. When the board got word of it at its next meeting, they mandated me to settle the problem once and for all. This time, when I came back to the Toronto office, I obtained the agreement of all parties to engage the help of an organizational psychologist, who would conduct a full review of the organization, with everyone's full cooperation. The results of this review were not favourable to Doreen; to put it simply, she was not suitable for her job after all. At the very moment that the results of the review were being shared with the staff and Doreen, the board members and I were in a telephone conference deciding to terminate her contract immediately. That was on a Friday afternoon. When I visited the organization's office the following Monday morning



to brief the staff about Doreen's dismissal, there was relief bordering on jubilation all around.

It took five to six months from the first sign of trouble to that final denouement. It was an extremely exhausting and emotionally draining time for the staff, the board and myself. The trust level between staff and board and between staff and me (I had been seen as Doreen's defender) was now at an all-time, critical low.

I did not let the matter rest, however. I believed deeply that this experience could not be swept aside as if it had never happened just because Doreen was now gone. Some positive change, if not a transformation in the organization, must come out of it. After considerable reflection among all of us, it was finally agreed that the board and staff together would undertake a collaborative, inclusive and comprehensive review of the functioning of the organization in general and the board-staff relationship in particular. Through this process, trust was rebuilt over the following year, so that when a new Executive Director was recruited through a vast, comprehensive and inclusive process, the choice was unanimous amongst all the stakeholders. That appointment worked out quite well.

While experiences such as this one are notable in their own right because of their passions, intrigue and stresses, they are difficult to live through; they produce no material gain, and yet carry significant personal cost in terms of time, energy and emotions. I repeat the question to myself: why take on these involvements, and why do so many other people also do so?

A clue to an answer to this question might lie in examining what actually goes on as these experiences unfold. Here, interaction steps out of the ordinary routine of everyday working and social life. It consists of conversations in the performance of governance functions as joint action carried out by people committed to the organization and its mission, each in his or her own way and for his or her own personal reasons – perhaps simply out of a passion for governance as an engaging activity.

I have often heard people say that they engage in volunteer governance because they espouse a certain cause, or because it exercises their mind and wits in pursuit of a goal they care about. Obviously, the first of these reasons could be satisfied with a lot less aggravation simply by supporting the organization as a donor or an occasional volunteer;

so it would seem that the second reason is the primary motivation. I have seen much that would convince me that this is the case. I would characterize this type of activity as creating self-meaning through direct personal engagement in the real workings of an enterprise: investing one's energies while bringing real resources to the organization through personal participation – surprisingly without the power to spend money or achieving any monetary gain. Just what 'self', 'meaning' and 'power' mean in this context would require further investigation.

### **A transformation through learning**

As the story pattern goes, after the struggle, there is transformation. I shall conclude this part of Project One with an account of an experience concerning the process of obtaining a Master of Management degree in 2002.

My first contact with the master's programme took place well before it was actually under way. I was at the time still head of the real estate developers' Association and chair of the board of a national coalition of non-governmental organizations. At this time, the McConnell Foundation, Canada's largest private foundation, was in the process of launching a new initiative to support capacity building within the Canadian voluntary sector, and had chosen McGill University as agent because it proposed to offer a new, modular programme of study leading to the degree of Master of Management for National Voluntary Sector Leaders.

The programme of study was to consist of modules based on the notion of 'mindsets', each exploring a specific area of leadership in voluntary-sector organizations. Frances Westley, a tenured professor and academic author of this programme, had decided to employ a process of stakeholder deliberation to flesh out the curriculum of each module in the programme. Through common acquaintances in my non-governmental organization involvements, I was invited by her to participate in a two-day process, which would also be attended by leaders of the Canadian voluntary sector and the faculty of the programme. I accepted willingly, without really knowing what was in store.

From the very first moment, I was deeply struck by the scope and meaning that was intended to be embedded in this degree programme and the quality of the people gathered to participate in the exercise, many of whom I knew well. As the process progressed, I sensed that I wanted – indeed that I needed – to get this degree; that it was right for me at

this time in my life. However, the programme was explicitly intended solely for staff members who had been identified as actual or emerging leaders within certain national voluntary-sector organizations. Although I was involved with one such national organization, as a chair of the board serving in a voluntary capacity I did not fit the programme's admissions criteria. But I persisted, and was admitted in June of 2000.

The experience was transformative. I began for the first time to discern concepts, ideas and constructs that helped me make sense of what I was observing every day. The reading list presented a wealth of theories and models of organizational and interpersonal behaviours in negotiation, collaboration, strategy making, human interaction and ethics. I remember coming upon *Strategy Safari* by Henry Mintzberg et al. (1998), and finding that it had all the excitement of a new novel. It was extremely stimulating to read the story of the origins, protagonists and deployment of strategy making in Western organizations. These ideas had an immediate effect on my action in work and volunteer participation: I was discovering that leadership and management were thoughtful, reflective learned behaviours, not some mystical insight or subconsciously exercised talent. One could improve, even excel with conscious effort and investment in learning. I could see theory informing my action as leader and collaborator, and equally importantly, reflect on how action informs theory. And it was during my master's studies that I came into contact with notions such as emergence, complexity, and the present DMan programme itself.

As the master's programme progressed, I also received unqualified encouragement from Frances as my tutor. Frances is an extraordinary teacher and leader of voluntary action in her own right. I found this recognition by someone I now knew and respected so deeply very moving and provocative. It became the impetus to persist with even more ardour. From that moment on, I have known that I had to continue on a learning path both informally and formally. This is exactly what I am doing as I write this paper and read for the DMan.

### **Return in practice**

As I was completing my Master of Management degree in late 2001, out of the mists of past and present action and social relations there appeared an opportunity that was a total surprise at the time and that I would not have considered without having lived the experience of the master's programme.

It was the late fall of 2001. The Government of Quebec had initiated a merger of all of the municipalities on the Island of Montreal into one mega-city. There was a municipal election, where I had the opportunity to reconnect with 'Frédéric', an old acquaintance from earlier days at the Association when I was a volunteer and he was the chief of staff of a minister in the provincial government. Frédéric was now the campaign manager for the leading candidate in the Montreal mayoral elections and would subsequently become the new mayor's chief of staff.

Just before Christmas 2001, while I was still comfortably set in my job at the real estate industry Association, Frédéric announced to me that he and the mayor wanted me to take the new job of Deputy General Manager of the City, with responsibility for urban and economic development and housing. My department would have a budget of \$30 million and a staff of two hundred. I was stunned by the invitation, and incredulous at the idea, for I had never managed anything of this scope or scale in my life. But I thought it over and finally decided to pursue it. I took up my new position in March 2002 on a five-year contract.

The City of Montreal at this point in its history was in the process of creating a new administrative organization. I was to be the first holder of my position at the very dawn of this new municipal adventure. It was a time of unbridled energy and enthusiasm: we were building a new public structure that would directly touch the everyday lives and fortunes of almost two million people. I could never have imagined acting at this level in any organization so large, with such complexity inherent in every moment, and feel that after all I could be up to the challenge. But so it was; I was confident, optimistic, committed to building a good organization, and set out to do so. Could I have succeeded? I like to think so, but perhaps there were organizational realities that my lack of experience made me blind to and would have sooner or later curtailed my chances. In any case, it all came to a premature end for me less than two years later after the departure of my original superior and his replacement by a new General Manager who decided to build a new team of his own, which was not to include me.

Since leaving the City, I have been working on a new real estate project for a private company owned by a wealthy family. I am also active on several non-profit boards of directors. And I have just recently reconnected with teaching at a McGill University,

having been invited by the school of architecture and the school of planning to help out as a seminar leader in an urban design studio of an architectural graduate programme.

### **Reflection and questions of inquiry**

What had started with that passing conversation with Mark in his car so long ago – my call - was nothing less than a departure from an established profession with its developed methodologies, schools of thought, ideologies and imaginable career path, onto a trajectory of struggles, transformation and return(s). But I sense that this is a trajectory that is forever shaping and reshaping itself, as new calls arise, as struggles continue. And when other transformations occur, as they may at every turn, those of yesterday may become just other struggles when seen from tomorrow. So it is a story being written and rewritten a little every day, in the living of it, without discernable beginnings or ends.

At the outset of this paper I asked: ‘How can I know what I think until I see what I write?’ Now, seeing what I’ve written, but also in the very writing of it, brings into view how I author my own story and that of those around me as they interact with me, giving me some sense of the notion of practice as a process by which we experience the world and our engagement with it as something meaningful (Wenger 1995), well beyond the daily struggles to earn a livelihood.

Through the narratives I have presented above, a number of themes emerge: joint action, co-constructing discourse, experiential learning, volunteering and paid work, self-development, social contributing. Do all of these notions, once explained, add up to an adequate reflection of practice?

Wenger (1998) describes practice as action and social relations in the pursuit of meaning. Meaning, for him, is constructed through the dual action of participation and reification. He posits that practice is enacted primarily in ‘communities of practice’ which can extend beyond structural boundaries of organizations. He characterizes community in this context as comprising groups of people with joint enterprise, mutual engagement and shared repertoires of concepts and vocabularies, wherever they are in time and space. Within these communities meaning is constructed, there are shared histories of learning, and there are boundaries and landscapes. Members locate themselves in communities of

practice in different ways.<sup>3</sup> And most organizations, whether highly structured or semi-formal, are generally made up of constellations of communities of practice crossing over structural boundaries everywhere.

My narrative certainly resonates with some of Wenger's proposals, at least conceptually. My narrative describes many instances of mutual engagement, experiences of learning as transformative, and joint action within formal and less formal groupings which could qualify as communities in Wenger's terms. But, it is interesting to note that while Wenger, in communities of Practice actually did his field work by working on the 'floor' of insurance adjusters of whom he writes, his account and thesis are not reflexive to any great extent. Thus, it strikes me that my experience of practice may be more than the sum of Wenger's proposals. Other themes emerge. The stories of experiences all cover broad arcs of time, during which many changes occurred in my life and the lives of those involved with me. These arcs intersect and overlap one another, while at every moment they contain an attendant reflection of the past and an attendant anticipated future, within a living present of communicative interaction (Stacey 2001: 173). At the same time, each arc embodies at least the three strands contained in the selection of stories as well as many other influences (such as my experience in teaching) which have yet to be articulated. Even the idea of being 'called' has repeated resonance, suggesting an appetite for action in spite of risk. One of my classmates has reminded me on several occasions, one cannot look at these stories and the overall narrative without sensing throughout an urge or a need to be continually *constructing*. Might that be what Weick (1995) calls a 'constant becoming'? This may well be getting closer to a true experience of practice.

Which theories related to practice, then, are reflected in my experience, and how can exploring and developing them contribute to a wider and deeper understanding of practice in general?

I can see that the DMan programme is the appropriate setting for this inquiry. At the residentials, in the readings and even in the shadow conversations, we agonize over breaking our implicit entrapment within 'default' ways of thinking, towards consciousness of how we truly get on in the world. We do so by exploring local interaction as a source of meaning, identity and change using our personal experiences

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<sup>3</sup> For instance, Wenger describes peripherality, where a person prefers to act on the boundaries creating connections between several communities rather than moving into the core of any community in particular.

and studies, in argument with each other and in our arguments in writing. My inquiry has emerged directly from this search to date, and will continue to be informed by it.





## **PROJECT TWO:**

### **CONSTRUCTING AN ALTERNATIVE ACCOUNT OF PRACTICE**

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#### **Introduction**

In the first project, I have shown that my practice, in the usual sense of the term, has consisted of a portfolio of engagements which has developed as I have moved from one type of activity and organization to another – any one of which could have become a career path in itself. My involvement in governance functions within a wide variety of charitable organizations over the entire span of my working life forms an integral part of this portfolio, which thus constitutes what I prefer to call my ‘active life’.

In this second research project, I explore more explicitly into my portfolio of engagements through a close examination of the range of my activities ongoing at the time of writing. I begin with detailed accounts of several different experiences, combined for purposes of illustration into a single narrative of a week’s activities. This device of relating detailed individual accounts flowing one into the other in a continuous time span as they might do in life removes the need to frame artificial beginnings and endings of separate narratives, and more readily allows the reality of these experiences to emerge through common patterns and themes.

On the basis of this narrative, which follows below, I will show how dominant management literature and discourse do not recognize the full scope or sense of what I call ‘practice’. This gap in recognition calls for the development of a fuller, more inclusive account of practice, which I then begin constructing on the basis of insights and arguments identified through a detailed examination of two scholars’ significant contributions to contemporary thought on practice.

#### **One week in July**

It is a Sunday afternoon in late July and I am on the train from Montreal to Toronto, where I shall participate as a volunteer in a two-day process with a special Advisory Committee of an organization which I shall call the ‘Adelaide Foundation,’ an environmental charity dedicated to the greening of Canadian cities. The Advisory Committee will select planners for the first phase of work on the ‘Adelaide Foundation Commons’ development project in downtown Toronto. The project consists of

transforming an abandoned former heavy industrial site, located in an otherwise beautiful natural ravine setting, into a vibrant environmental showcase and community centre.

The project is a major urban redevelopment undertaking, and neither the Foundation nor ‘Greg’, its young CEO and founder, has ever done anything like it before. Greg is confident in the organization’s ability (and his own) to pull together all of the skills and funding necessary to carry out the project – about \$40 million in Canadian dollars – and has already assembled an impressive cast of stakeholder-users in support of it.

I have known Greg since we were in our Master’s degree program together three years ago (see Project One), and have joined the board of Adelaide Foundation as Vice-Chair, at his invitation. Since then his interaction with me has been as with any other board member. However, now that the Adelaide Commons project became a central preoccupation of the Foundation, I have suggested that my experience in urban development and real estate projects may be useful to Greg and his team in moving the project forward. I have some time at my disposal at present so I have offered to spend some of it with them to help think things through. He agreed, and in recent months, I have been visiting Toronto more frequently and have begun to interact more closely with Greg, some of the staff members and two key members of the board: the chair and incoming chair, who are long-time confidants of Greg’s; both are also active in urban development in their working lives. Together with Greg we created a Project Advisory Committee, which my board colleagues have asked me to chair.

Since a project of this nature – a large-scale urban development undertaken by a non-governmental organization working to a social, environmental and financial bottom line – is novel in its own right and new to all of us, we are admittedly muddling our way through. Conversation informed by experience seems to be the basic strategy for moving ahead. In my role of committee chair and as a volunteer with some experience in urban development, I have been coaching Greg and his team in working out a project development process that should satisfy the requirements of the board, funders and stakeholders, and serve Adelaide Foundation’s mission.

On Monday morning, at the project site, we meet in a roughly finished room with high ceilings and old industrial-style windows overlooking the metal roofs of the project’s vast derelict sheds. The walls are covered with photographs and other project graphics put

there by the Adelaide Foundation team working on site in this room. There are seven of us present: the three Advisory Committee members, two expert volunteers from public sector bodies, and Greg and his second-in-command. As Vice-Chair of the Adelaide Foundation board and chair of the Advisory Committee, I am called upon to chair the sessions we will hold with six different groups of architects over the next two days. The point of these sessions is to compose a short list of three firms, which will be invited to submit a formal offer of services. We are to determine each architect's understanding of the project and get a feel for how each will interact with Adelaide Foundation staff and volunteers during the upcoming planning process, which by nature will be iterative and highly interactive.

We meet with each architectural firm for about one hour. The committee listens to the presentations and engages in discussion with the presenters. After each meeting, we do a half-hour debriefing among ourselves to compare our reactions and opinions – how each of us feels about what he or she has just witnessed. During these discussions we discover the presence of a wide variety of perceptions within the group. I too have my opinions, and try to remain aware of the challenge of appropriately managing the conversation fairly as well as expressing my opinions.

As it happens, my cell phone rings, but I ignore the call and pick up the message at the first break. It was one of the consultants I have invited to submit an offer of services for an environmental due-diligence study for the large-scale real estate development project in Montreal which is my paid work, as one of the project's managers. This project is now in the early stages of land acquisition and preliminary planning studies. Upon receiving this call, I have a passing thought about how odd it must seem to others that here I am, doing volunteer work on a major project for two days, while I have an important paid project to keep me more than busy at home.

For the rest of the day, the meetings continue positively on all fronts until we break in the mid-afternoon. Later on, I try writing some of this paper in my hotel room, but that does not work very well, so I find a comfortable terrace in the hot Toronto evening for a Guinness and a passable meal.

On Tuesday the process continues. The last two groups of architects appear before us, and then we settle down for an in-depth discussion towards a decision by consensus. Here

I have to be careful: my immediate task is to chair the meeting so that we arrive at a conclusion we can all accept. Yet I do have my own opinions, which should figure in the mix; this is one of the reasons why I am on the committee in the first place. So I decide that I'll speak last, and state my opinions and arguments at that time.

I listen closely to all of the others. I begin to feel uneasy that they are giving too much weight to qualities of the candidates peripheral to the specific job we want done, however important those qualities may be. So when I finally speak, I feel compelled to remind everyone of just what the process is that the Adelaide Foundation is engaged in at this particular moment in the life of the project. I insist that our reflections should refer to this framework. Only then do I give my own evaluation of the presenters. But as I do so I recognize that I am in fact presenting an argument. I am defending my positions as having been arrived at by some rational, cognitive process that can be demonstrated and talked about, and therefore has specific merit. Arguing like this is the way I most often engage in decision making in groups. But I can see that clearly not everyone reasons in this way. My argumentation sometimes engages others and influences decisions; but it can also overpower or alienate others who do not argue as forcefully or who adopt positions more intuitively and defend them less argumentatively than I do.

In any event, we reach a consensus quickly and enjoyably. Everyone seems quite satisfied with the choice and the process thus far. We congratulate ourselves for another step forward in the massive undertaking of that the project represents. As it turns out, we are all pretty much on the same wavelength, in spite of my earlier misgivings. I realize I had been anticipating what others would decide when they were merely 'thinking out loud' while participating in the conversation. I'm thrilled with the outcome and head off to the train station in the car with Greg. In the course of our conversation, he remarks that it was a good thing that I waited till the end to speak, resisting my urge to take up each intervention and instead letting the conversation find its own course. He says that this was a good example of chairpersonship – one from which he can learn.

On Wednesday I am back at 'PMV', my employer in Montreal, working on the 'Citadel' project, a planned 100,000-square-metre multi-purpose development to include the restoration of a historic hotel and the construction of retail, office and residential spaces on property we are in the process of acquiring from the City. I have joined up to work part-time at PMV through the auspices of Mark, with whom I had reconnected when I

began working for the City. After the Mayor had asked us senior managers to find external collaborators to participate as voices from outside the City apparatus, I had involved Mark in certain initiatives within my department. At the time the City was freshly into post-amalgamation and Mark, who was quite interested in making the amalgamation work, had welcomed this opportunity to play a part.

From the outset, our collaboration was productive and intense. Mark seemed to genuinely appreciate how I was going about my new charge, and I valued the support and ingenuity he brought into my work. Throughout my time at the City, the two of us were successful in moving several complex initiatives forward, including an innovative theatre-district development programme which has truly taken wing. During this same period Mark began work on the Citadel venture, and when the time came for me to leave the City he asked me to join him.

Up to now, Citadel has been advancing quite well. Most recently, however, we have been called upon to purchase the city property outright on very short notice, instead of at the end of a year-long option period we thought we had at our disposal to assemble the resources we would need for the project. Now an immediate multi-million-dollar cash outlay will be required, which Mario, the owner of PMV, does not have at his short-term disposal. Another strategy is now needed quickly to avoid losing the deal and all we have put into the project over the last year.

A meeting is called in the boardroom to discuss the situation. This room is long and narrow, with a full wall of floor-to-ceiling windows overlooking downtown Montreal from our thirty-third-floor roost. Attending the meeting are Mark (who holds responsibility for Citadel), Mario and three of his close internal advisors, and myself. The first thing I notice is that Mario is sitting all alone at the far end of the table as usual, while the rest of us are crowded around the other end near the door. I'm at the opposite head of the table facing Mario, which was the only seat available at this end of the room when I walked into the meeting. Mark is sitting on my right.

I outline how much operating cash we are going to need to bring the Citadel land deal to a close, and what we anticipate having to spend between closing and actually launching development. The advisors, in chorus, chime in to point out some errors in our calculations. An uncomfortable moment ensues. The chorus starts to pick away at our

tentative agreement with the City. This line gains momentum and I begin to feel the intensity of it building. I resent what I perceive to be a facile, negative critique of what we have accomplished in arranging this deal, and begin to fear that the deal itself is being threatened. I try to counter their line of attack by arguing that we will be lucky to have this opportunity at all, as the City could easily still sell the land to any one of several other buyers; we cannot afford to be too demanding.

It strikes me that this reaction is clearly defensive and that I may be overreacting to some simple questions not intended to threaten. I feel uneasy as I see myself this way, defensive and closed to others' suggestions. After all, what is wrong with trying to obtain further concessions from the vendor? The City can only say no – no harm done. So why is it that I do not even want to ask? I realize that I often find myself in this position of resenting being called into question, when invariably it is simpler and more collaborative to recognize what might be a good idea and get on with it. I know that I react this way in certain types of circumstances and not in others, and I suspect it has something to do with my status relative to my interlocutors. In this case I want Mario's support; I see his advisors' criticisms as threatening that support, and I simply want them to stop.

Mark then makes his pitch to get agreement to move forward with the purchase according to the new requirements of the City. He appeals to Mario's ego as the eventual owner and developer of this signature project, to be recognized for his vision and courage for undertaking such an ambitious project. He downplays the flaws in the calculations as not in fact being the issue. Here I see a master at work. Mark has a powerful command of language such that his ideas come across in a way that people like and trust – even though his words themselves do not form strong arguments and may even sometimes seem excessive and exaggerated to the dispassionate listener. I find myself listening to Mark's talk on many occasions and thinking that I could never bring myself to speak intuitively as he does, for fear of being caught on the spot saying something I cannot defend rationally. I also notice how Mark is never defensive; he has absolute confidence in his powers of persuasion.

The meeting ends with agreement that we must limit our cash outlay and therefore must scurry around to find third-party investors who can join us in sharing the risk and cost of carrying the project forward. As for the deal with the City, it will be left as is, although the discomfort of the advisors' chorus has not been totally dispelled.

When I get back to my desk, there is a message waiting from ‘André’, the lawyer for the Citadel project. André wants to let me know that he has suggested my name to members of a Toronto development group, who need local advice for a major project they are considering in Montreal. A representative of the group calls a short while later, and asks to meet me the following morning.

As the end of the day approaches, I start thinking about my upcoming evening meeting with the members of the Church. I have not heard from anyone from the Church for some time (for an account of my past involvement, see Project One) , but Nancy has called recently out of the blue to ask if I can help a certain committee in its attempts to acquire a plot of land for sale adjacent to the Church’s property. This land is to be sold by public tender, and the committee members do not quite know how to go about putting together a bid. I agree to help on a volunteer basis; in any event the task should not be overly demanding. I arrive at the Church at the appointed time. It is mid-evening, and the temperature is sweltering hot outside and in, so the seven of us choose to meet in the rather large, air-conditioned parish hall instead of the more comfortably furnished – and hotter – meeting room on the second floor. We are seated at a table in one corner, and despite the echo in the hall we manage to communicate quite well. This is my second meeting with the committee, which is made up of church members from various walks of life – people with no particular expertise in the details of the business at hand: how a price will be set, how to go forward in responding to the call for tenders and how to determine what the overall transaction will cost.

As our discussion gets under way, we discover that practically every committee member has a different idea about how much should be offered for the land. One member considers the eventual purchase as just another form of investment, so that it does not matter how much money is taken out of bank investments and spent on the land: the investment could be recuperated at any time by reselling the land. To this person, the strategy would be to bid very high. Another member is preoccupied with the committee’s fiduciary responsibility not to waste money, and therefore wants to spend ‘just enough to win’. He asks if there is some way that they, as a church, can get special treatment from the seller. Yet another member wants to propose that in lieu of money the vendor be offered charitable tax receipts or special mention in the Church bulletin as being a good corporate citizen. The very last member to speak thinks that as a matter of principle they

‘should offer what the professional evaluator says the land is worth, and live with the consequences, win or lose’. (What he actually means to say is that they should never pay *more* than what it is worth.)

As a non-member of the congregation or the committee, I participate in this conversation but do not take a position, only suggesting alternative ways of looking at the problem as I see them, or commenting on the feasibility of some of the suggestions I am hearing. I am keenly aware of the influence I can have with this group, and I want to avoid being looked to for a ‘right’ answer. I am also aware that I need some time and conversation to sort out my own thoughts.

Over the course of the discussion, it becomes clear that no one opinion is gaining sway, and that no one is in a position to impose his or her will – which, even if possible, would not be considered proper in this particular church community. Yet there is no natural leadership, nor any idea about a method for reaching agreement on what to offer. But time is short since the bid has to be submitted within two weeks.

I try a new approach on the group. First I point out that Church can never lose *all* the money it may spend on the land, whatever the amount, since the land can always be resold for some amount even if they do nothing with it. In other words, their risk is some amount *less* than the total offer they will make. Then I ask if the social purpose for which they wish to use this land (for example, a seniors’ hospice or neighbourhood services) is worth risking such an amount of money – if so, do they have a feeling for how much that might be? This suggestion succeeds in focusing attention on an issue they can discuss constructively. With that, we conclude the meeting and agree to meet again the following week.

Thursday morning arrives, and it’s time to meet the representatives of the development group from Toronto. I join them and André in a beautifully appointed meeting room in the ‘Rialto Hotel’, a significant heritage property on Montreal’s most historic downtown street, and the object of the planned development project. The group is made up of the presidents and vice-presidents of the Toronto development company and the Rialto hotel chain from Washington, DC.

After the niceties, the meeting begins with the Toronto group explaining their project idea to me and to André. As it turns out, the project is nothing less than the purchase and



complete redevelopment of the historic Rialto hotel. The plan is for the Rialto company to buy back the hotel (one of the three original Rialto hotels in the world, it had been sold to another operator some time ago), upgrade it significantly, demolish a part of the building and add an eighteen-storey wing of super-deluxe condominium apartments to be operated in conjunction with the hotel. They are in the pre-purchase due-diligence process and need advice locally as to what will be necessary to bring the project to fruition if they do indeed go through with the purchase.

Entirely of his own accord, André jumps right into the conversation with his assessment of the issues and difficulties such a project would encounter in Montreal. I wait to let him finish and pass over to me; but he is slow to do so, and in fact is proceeding to cover all of the ground that I thought I was there to cover. After he makes a few remarks that skirt around what I consider some key issues, I feel compelled to intervene. In the ensuing discussion, I enumerate each of the issues a project like this will cause in the Montreal political and cultural milieu as I know it; and they are legion. In the process I give the group a virtual urban, heritage and political tour of Montreal today, with the necessary background. A lively conversation begins about what can be done to ensure success, and I find myself suggesting strategies specifically appropriate to the Montreal situation. I am vastly enjoying myself in this meeting. I feel as if I am at the top of my game. This kind of reflection on strategy is something I revel in: it calls upon every skill and resource I have developed in managing urban development issues in Montreal.

The Rialto discussion lasts about an hour. I then return to the office, where bids were due from environmental consultants for the Citadel due-diligence analysis I mentioned earlier. At the same time, we are scouting out hotel partners for Citadel, and a report on the status of the project must be sent to our financial partners. As the environmental consulting offers are coming in, I book a meeting for the next day to go over them with our legal counsel.

I am attending to all of this when I get a call from one of the Rialto representatives asking me to make them an offer of services to be the chief representative in Montreal for their entire project. He says that he and his colleagues are totally convinced that I would be indispensable to the success of their venture in Montreal. However flattering it may be to hear such a suggestion, this is a troubling moment because I doubt that this work could be compatible with my work at PMV. Although I am employed only part-time at PMV, I

doubt that my employer would contemplate work such as the Rialto project on my off-days, which are intended to be used for my doctoral studies and volunteer work. I decide to choose an appropriate time to raise this openly with Mark, and reckon that that will be if and when I get a formal offer from the Rialto group. Until then, I do not feel there is much to talk about.

Friday starts with a meeting with our lawyers to review the Citadel environmental file, and we lay out a process to choose the best offer. I wish to make sure that the project partnership is well covered for environmental risk and that PMV is properly protected in the event any legal action against the firm as the operating partner, should environmental problems arise in the future. After the meeting, I go to lunch with Fred from the McConnell Foundation that had sponsored my Master's degree program (see Project One).

Fred, who is vice-president of the foundation, is seeking my advice for the second time regarding a grant application he is handling from a charitable organization devoted to care of the elderly, seeking funds to upgrade a seniors' residence that they own. Together we examine different facets of the situation, ranging from how seniors' health care functions within the social service system to the market for seniors' residential units. My contribution to the conversation is largely based on the knowledge of the health system I have gained as a member of a hospital board of directors, the work we are doing at PMV on the possibility of investing in seniors' housing ourselves, and my long-time personal friendship with a very knowledgeable director of a local community clinic specializing in seniors' home care. I offer to connect Fred with this person so that he can get a much better picture of what is actually at stake in his file. Fred likes this idea. We end our lunch and I go home to work on this project for the rest of the day and over the weekend.

### **Dominant ways of talking about practice in organizations**

The preceding narrative is a composite sketch of a week of my working life and is, I believe, an accurate representation that conveys the true sense of my day-to-day involvements, however varied, as one continuum. This narrative also correctly reflects the way in which I work: the demands on my time and the types of interactions, settings and processes in which I typically engage in the course of both my volunteer engagements and my paid work.

In thinking about what this narrative has to offer to this inquiry into practice, I ask myself first in what way what it portrays represents a 'practice' at all. A practice could perhaps be inferred from each one of the activities described in the narrative, in that there is enterprise and social relations in each case, as Wenger (1998) describes practice; but to what extent together do they form a practice? Or is this actually a set of practices? Or a practice of practices?

Practice in organizations takes many shapes and names.

In *Communities of Practice* (1998), Wenger writes about people in jobs – claims agents in a large insurance company – who derive their practice from their organizational role and by affiliating in communities of people doing the same jobs or parts of jobs. In *The Reflective Practitioner*, Schön talks about profession as something practitioners do by name, revealing his preoccupation with the comportment of the 'major, near-major and minor professions – architect, psychoanalyst, doctor, manager, engineer – for which there is a long-developed tradition in each case as to what in fact constitutes the practice (Schön 1991: 23). Schön admits to the ambiguity of the term 'practice' as being, on the one hand, 'when we speak of a lawyer's practice, we mean the kinds of things he does, the clients he has, the range of cases he is called upon to handle' and on the other, preparing for a performance, as in practicing for a piano recital (ibid: 60). Dreyfus and Rabinow (1983) describes Michel Foucault's analysis as centring on disciplines as society-sanctioned roles in bureaucracies or professional cadres, combining knowledge and power in discursive practices within broad social contexts of non-discursive practices.

These examples suggest that the dominant way of talking about practice in organized activity – other than private, cultural or traditional practices – in Western organizational discourse tends to turn upon occupations, professions and jobs, as manifestations of publicly recognized roles or functions within organized activity. In fact, this way of looking at practice is deeply rooted in the way organized human activity has been viewed in the modern era. Consider Elias's account (2000) of the civilizing process of the Western world. Here, Elias describes regimes of power in the path toward statehood needed to be supported logistically by knowledgeable people in highly defined roles that became increasingly differentiated as the size and scope of the regimes grew. Likewise, according to the Marxist account of industrial production, increasing centralization of the

means of production produced ever-greater refinement in the division of labour among individual workers required for the production process (Burkitt 1991: 119-120). For Foucault, the rise of social disciplines developed in response to the state's increased control and confinement of the bodies and bodily functions of the populace (asylums, prisons, schools, clinics, control of prostitution, for example), which necessitated ever-increasingly differentiated expertise in the techniques of confinement and control, at the same time as the state supplied the research settings to develop that expertise (Dreyfus and Rabinow 1983: 130-131).

The ideas cited above provide all deal with the rise of cooperative human action in the modern era. Moreover, it is commonly held that such cooperation 'always and everywhere implies interdependence and divided labour . . . To attain the common goal, or complete the common task, each actor necessarily performs a different portion of the common effort' (Kemper 1972: 742). To bolster his position, Kemper (1972) also cites Émile Durkheim who in 1933 developed a sociological theory to explain the division of labour in society: 'To cooperate, in short, is to participate in a common task. If this is divided into tasks qualitatively similar, but mutually indispensable, there is simple division of labour of the first degree. If they are different there is compound division of labour, specialization properly called. . . . When men unite in a contract, it is because through division of labour, whether simple or complex, they need each other' (in Kemper 1972: 739).

If, then, the prescription of the division of labour and differentiation of roles is at the root of organized human action, it follows that some form of alignment between what one does in organizations and one's personality must be achievable, if not already exist. On just this point, Filer attempts to develop means 'to predict which of a number of broadly defined occupational groups an individual will enter' (1986: 412). He has 'analyzed the impact of various personality and taste factors' (16 in number) on the occupational distribution (5 in number) of workers. Those factors were found to have strong effects that were generally consistent with a well functioning labour market sorting individuals into those jobs that most closely satisfy their individual utility functions', as captured by differences in personality and tastes (Filer 1986: 423). It is worth noting that Filer does not mention that differentiation of roles in a well-functioning labour market may in fact emerge interactively in relation to the skills available in the working population, and that

this may be as important a factor as (possibly even more important than) the rational choices imposed by managers and corporate planners.

Views such as those of Kemper, Durkheim and Filer are systemic take for granted that any particular differentiation of roles or division of labour prevailing in the economy and organizations must be in tune with the psychological make-up of human beings, aligned with the roles and functions prescribed within organizational schema. In fact, research quoted in Filer goes a step further, positing that people choose their occupation (i.e. their role within the division of labour or the labour market) as the result of an implicit cognitive, rational cost-benefit analysis of greatest gain to be achieved over an entirely predictable working career. Here again we see the assumption that people can be expected to act in organizations according to predetermined roles, and that the proper design of these roles will reflect human nature as a matter of course.

Still other points of view stress practice as a medium of social interaction leading to development of identity, through learning or interactive processes. For example, E. C. Hughes wrote in 1928 that persons are transformed by their occupational selection, the transformation being all the more complete the more technical and occupational their training is and the more completely mobility requires leaving behind local, familial ties and mores. Once distant from their native home, the 'person finds a 'life-organization' in the occupational group, social objects and attitudes, and definitions of his wishes' (Hughes 1928: 754). In a similar vein, Wenger (2004) proposes the added dimension of practice as learning. And there are myriad other accounts of the relationship between work, practice and occupation, and the formation of identity and personality (Burkitt 1991; Weick 1995; Wertsch 1985). In the end, though, while the individual may be transforming and learning, the assumption is that these processes occur within and are comfortably aligned with a preset differentiation of roles or division of labour.

I am arguing here that the paradigm of the division of labour and role differentiation dominates the way in which practice is regarded and spoken about in organizational discourse, and that this is rooted in modernist theories about the rise of human cooperative action in the Western world. I am also making the observation that organized activity as portrayed in my narrative is absent from this dominant discourse. The lack of definition of the nature of the various encounters, the movement from encounter to encounter inside and outside of defined organizational boundaries, and the way each

encounter is taken up without the benefit of clearly circumscribed roles or divisions of responsibility in doing so, are several aspects of my narrative which do not appear in the dominant account, but which I feel are significant to the account of practice I seek to develop.

Does this mean that what I do is *not* a practice? Before we allow such a conclusion, we must ask: why is it the case in the dominant discourse that practices like mine are excluded from it? What is concealed on the hither side of this *doxa*?

### **Towards an alternative account of practice**

My critique of the dominant discourse as I describe it in the preceding section flows from the reflexive methodological approach and ontological position which I indicated I would follow at the outset of this dissertation. The dominant discourse assumes that people interact in the ways that their assigned roles and functions are planned to work as interrelated parts of a shared task. Once one accepts this premise, it follows that practice must be defined in these same terms: that is, as the application of skills and techniques in line with the prescribed tasks, roles and functions. This is a logical conclusion, given that the accounts of practice presented in the preceding section look at practice and organizations in one particular way, and that is from the outside – how the organization, society or investigator sees practice or sees the person in practice. As such, the dominant conception of practice maintains a dualism of the social and the individual, and, moreover, places the social first.

For instance, while Wenger may well write about ‘communities of practice’, where individuals pursuing enterprise always do so in interaction, so that the resulting practice ‘belongs to the community’ (Wenger 1998: 45), or that practice ‘connotes doing . . . in a social and historical context that gives substance and meaning to what we do’ (ibid. 47), it is nonetheless true that the objective of the enterprise or the ‘doing’ to which he refers is inevitably set outside of the individual, is something outside of the individual him or herself which the individual engages in, allowing him or her to learn (internalize) or develop identity as an interactant with the organization external to him or herself. In this view, the practitioner and his or her practice together form what I term a simple enactment of something determined by others, however possibly subject to change over time. This is an extension of Kantian philosophy, ‘where practice is an activity seeking a

goal which is conceived as a result of following certain general principles of procedure' (Turner 1994: 8).

In light of this reflection, and as part of my attempt to develop an alternative way of talking about practice, I have sought out sources that appear to diverge from the dominant view as I have presented it here, perhaps capturing elements that I consider to be absent from that view. In this regard, two other accounts of practice bear a close look. Schön's *The Reflective Practitioner* (1991) is appealing because it looks into the internal processes of the practitioner, inferring what they might be from observation. Turner's *The Social Theory of Practices* (1994), opens up several promising avenues of reflection for me by virtue of the author's dispute with the social theory approach to practice in general.

### *The Reflective Practitioner*

As a trained architect who interacts with the design professions on a regular basis, it seems to me especially pertinent to account in particular for professional practice in order to capture my professional biases in the more general account of practice that I am endeavouring to build. Schön's extensive work in this field offers an excellent source for this purpose.

Schön's proposals are quite compelling. He points to a crisis of confidence in professional knowledge as being mismatched to real situations of practice rightly characterized as complex, uncertain and unstable, and attributes this state of affairs to the intellectual hegemony of Positivism, 'the powerful philosophical doctrine that grew up in the nineteenth century as an account of the rise of science and technology and as a social movement aimed at applying the achievements of science and technology to the well-being of mankind' (Schön 1991: 31). The heritage of Positivism is Technical Rationality, an epistemology of professional practice which consists of 'in instrumental problem solving made rigorous by the application of scientific theory and technique. . . . [This] view has . . . powerfully shaped both our thinking about the professions and the institutional relations of research, education, and practice' to the exclusion of artistry in practice (ibid 1991: 21). It is so embedded in institutions of professional education and self-governance that its dominance is institutionally perpetuated without significant challenge.

Schön responds with a plea for the return by the professions to the philosophy of science before Positivism and the 'Technological Program' (p. 31), to science 'as a process in

which scientists grapple with uncertainties and display arts of inquiry akin to the uncertainty and arts of practice. Let us then reconsider the question of professional knowledge; let us stand the question on its head....Let us search, instead, for an epistemology of practice implicit in the artistic, intuitive processes which some practitioners do bring to situations of uncertainty, instability, uniqueness, and value conflict' (p. 49). This he calls 'reflection-in-action' (p. 49ff).

Reflection-in-action rests on a basic notion of what Schön calls 'knowing-in-action' (p. 59), which is a form of knowing akin to know-how: a tacit knowledge of what needs to be done, which is called upon unconsciously and spontaneously in the doing, as opposed to the conscious application of some prior theory. When we are confronted with a situation of uncertainty, instability or uniqueness, or with a conflict of values, we find ourselves surprised or stymied by the situation itself. In such situations, experience tells us that to act spontaneously is risky, that outcomes are unpredictable and may be harmful. Thus we reflect on the situation while we are acting into it, though still within the context of the particular knowledge we are apt to apply. We use judgment. We seek to make sense of the situation in our practical reality. Simply put, this reflective process means thinking while doing; thinking about the situation as it is evolving. The thinker still sees the situation as apart from him or her, and stops short of thinking about the doing while doing, and thinking about thinking about doing, which would be reflexive turns.

Reflection-in-action is in effect a process of learning. In this way a professional confronted with a complex situation in practice inquires according to a philosophy of science whereby practice and research inform each other iteratively. They are not separate as they must be within the Technical Rationality paradigm, where research necessarily precedes practice. The practitioner brings his or her experience to bear, without conscious articulation, on a unique situation within a process of 'seeing-as'<sup>4</sup> then doing-as then seeing-as anew, in successive iterations. Experience and education provide a repertoire of moves, expectations, images, techniques and language to permit seeing-as through exemplars or what Schön calls 'generative metaphors' (p. 185) providing new perceptions and explanations to keep the inquiry going. Ultimately, a solution, frame or set-problem emerges that satisfies the practitioner-researcher according to his or her

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<sup>4</sup> Schön derives this expression from Wittgenstein: 'In reference to examples such as "seeing the figure as a box" and seeing the duck/rabbit picture as a rabbit, Wittgenstein points out that seeing-as is at once, and ambiguously, a process of seeing and thinking' (Schön 1991: 361).



schema of just what constitutes ‘acceptable’ or ‘better’ – aesthetically, philosophically or otherwise.

There are certain similarities between reflection-in-action and the method of bricolage I have adopted and described earlier in this dissertation. It would seem that the repertoire of moves, expectations, images, language, metaphors and exemplars can also be seen as materials that are useful because they are in fact known; and they become known through lived experience in all its dimensions – not only through formal education but as a result of whatever exposures the practitioner has experienced over the course of life. In both reflection-in-action and bricolage the research methodology and practice mirror each other: the wider the scope of experience, the greater and more diverse the repertoire of materials that can be put to use in any given situation.

For the purposes of my argument here, just what does reflection-in-action actually signify? On the face of it, Schön’s proposals could be located in single-loop or double-loop learning-process thinking, where each gesture produces feedback which changes the next gesture. But Schön does not refer to this as ‘learning’; instead he calls it a ‘reflective conversation’ with the situation or materials (p. 151), suggesting some form of emergence through a process of gesture and response interaction. By doing so he is either using the term ‘conversation’ metaphorically as a generative technique, or he is getting at something other than a single-or double-loop cognitive process.

I believe that Schön is using the notion of reflective conversation knowingly as a generative metaphor to explore reflection-in-action as a concept which goes beyond single-loop learning. Schön is seeking to explain in general how novel syntheses arise in practice. He understands that a single- or double-loop learning model cannot explain emergence or novelty, even within the confines of the practitioner’s mental models (see below). He brings the social into his inquiry, although he fails to explore this dimension to any significant degree, simply attributing it for the most part to the situation at hand.

What Schön terms a reflective conversation with the situation or with materials can in fact be viewed as the functionalizing of inner conversation, as in Mead’s account (1934) of thinking and the emergence of mind and self. According to Mead, thought takes the form of inner conversation with ourselves, as object and subject at the same time, and with the other or generalized other, which is one’s broader social or cultural group. We

can actually take up the viewpoint and feelings of the other and generalized other within the conversation, because of the human capacity to take the role of the other. In Schön's terms, in the conversation with the situation or materials as an inner conversation, the practitioner is interacting in thought with himself or herself and the generalized other which embodies the professional school of thought to which he or she subscribes, as well as other aspects of the broader social group, which permits evaluating the emerging results within the paradigm – epistemology, ontology, methodology (Denzin and Lincoln 2000: 19) – of that community.

By using examples of conversations with persons and materials as he does, Schön is rendering inner private conversation public and visible, so that he as researcher can observe it within experimental protocols. He is using methodological trappings in order to be seen as 'objective' and therefore credible in his academic setting. It is interesting to note that given Schön's past 'working life as an industrial consultant, technology manager, urban planner, policy analyst, and teacher in a professional school' (Schön 1991: vii), he could just as well have done a reflexive study using his own experience and his own inner conversations. Nowhere in the book, however, does he relate his conclusions to his own rich experience.

Nonetheless, by casting conversation as a fundament of professional practice, Schön is positing something significant. He is locating practice in the field of processes of interaction, effectively opening up inquiry to questions of embodiment, novelty, and the formation of self. MacLean and MacIntosh address a similar theme, calling it 'creative action' (2005: 12). They begin with the same epistemological position as Schön, joining knowing and doing, and critiquing the pre-eminence of normative and purely rational approaches. They maintain that creative action can be described as 'the interplay of emergent intentions, embodied expression and interactive relating' (ibid. 23).

I interpret from Schön's proposal that intentions are equally emergent in that ends in the form of an interpretive synthesis acceptable to the practitioner and his or her community are unknowable from the outset and emerge through the internal processes of interaction he describes, captured in the notions of conversation with materials representing a virtual world. Interactive relating is reflected in the conversational metaphor. In both cases, context and biographies matter in that it is from these that the actor draws his or her repertoire of moves, concepts and language, often unconsciously. As I will explain later,

this interpretation begins to suggest areas of exploration in the development of my own proposals regarding practice.

Finally, I would like to call attention to the role of mental models in Schön's thinking. Schön identifies the locus of the ontological differences between the professions as the 'constants' underlying each individual professional practice:

- 'The media, languages, and repertoires that practitioners use to describe reality and conduct experiments
- 'The appreciative systems they bring to problem setting, to the evaluation of inquiry, and to reflective conversation
- 'The overarching theories by which they make sense of phenomena
- 'The role frames within which they set their tasks and through which they bound their institutional settings' (Schön 1991: 269–70).

The words Schön uses to describe these constants indicate their character as what Stacey (2003) calls 'mental models': the tacit perceptual frames from within which people encounter the world, and which make efficient action possible. Mental models are developed through single-loop learning and require double-loop learning in order to change them (Stacey 2003: 108–109). For Schön, keeping mental models tacit has the negative effect of reinforcing the mystical quality of artistry in practice, suggesting that such artistry is based on some innate capacity of the individual. To counter such recourse to mysticism as an explanation, convinced as he is that the capacity for reflection-in-action can be learned and perfected, Schön encourages reflection on reflection – reflecting on how one ought to reflect – suggesting techniques such as repertoire-building research, frame analysis, research on fundamental methods of inquiry and overarching theories and research on the process of reflection-in-action (Schön 1991: 315–7). This 'agenda of reflective research' will support practitioners in the development of their mental models as they reflect on them, and will be generated out of dialogue between reflective researchers and practitioner-researchers' (Schön 1991: 324).

Ultimately Schön makes significant advances in moving thought on professional practice out of the Technical Rationality paradigm and into the realm of reflective action. His

central constructs – knowing-in-action, problem setting and reflective conversation with situations and materials – are appealing ideas. In fact, looking back on my own narrative, I could easily identify as problem-setting the moment when I framed the challenge before the church committee as determining how much money the social use of the land they wished to buy was worth. But I would consider that a technique of practice, not my practice itself. I find that, in the end, Schön's account of practice is nonetheless bound to predefined roles, regulated by mental models, appreciative systems, overarching theories and role frames.

### *The Social Theory of Practices*

I turn to Turner's book at this point for a variety of reasons. First, his is an important contribution to the subject of practice, most notably as an effort to demystify the notion of shared public behaviours. Second, given bricolage as my methodology, I felt that it was important to explore and appropriate this work so as to be in a position to use its strong, well-crafted arguments as helpful tools for my own reflection at this stage.

Turner does not specifically address the narrower band of meaning of practice which is my topic, but which is nonetheless subsumed in his subject. He writes about practice writ large, an ambiguous notion that might have any number of meanings in context: shared presuppositions, paradigms, embodied or tacit knowledge. Given this ambiguity, Turner considers the very concept of 'practices' to be flawed, and so undertakes to give a more satisfactory account of the concept and its uses. In so doing, he 'undermine[s] the notion of practices, and especially in the form of the theory that practices are embedded in some sort of social substrate – the 'social theory of practices' of the title' (Turner 1994: 11). His method is deceptively simple: using the tenets of the social theory of practice as his starting point, he proceeds to systematically disprove that these tenets can hold epistemologically, leaving only one conception possible in the end, as I will describe later in this section.

Turner starts out by showing how the concept of shared practices must function if it is to be explained within social theory. First he examines the causal aspect of practice: how practices become mental traces causing shared habits of behaviour. Then he considers the meaning of practices as shared presuppositions, which should also produce manifestly similar behaviours among different people. In both cases, sameness in causes of behaviour, which are necessarily tacit, should produce sameness in manifest behaviour. If

such causes are in the form of psychological possessions, as in social theory, this would signify that psychological possessions also can be shared.

This logic raises two insurmountable problems for Turner. First, we can never know for certain what the unconscious mental causes of behaviour are, since they are necessarily tacit and can only be inferred from observed behaviour. Second, the fact that some behaviours are the same does not necessarily mean that their *causes* are the same. In fact, for every behaviour, more than one tacit cause can easily be inferred: to suppose that tacit causes are the same between people on the basis of similar observed behaviour is simply an untenable position. Moreover, inference and interpretation fail because we can only draw inferences on the basis of comparisons with our individually held ways of knowing and seeing. Turner points to anthropological studies that infer, on the basis of a few relics, ways of thinking and acting, ideas and customs, which supposedly must have existed in ancient cultures but which may in fact bear no relationship at all to the situation or civilization under study. For Turner, even making explicit our own ways of seeing and knowing is a dubious exploit: 'Indeed, in general, we discover our own assumptions, to the extent that we do, by standing on the stern of our boat and watching for them in the wake, and finding that they become easier to identify the farther they recede' (Turner 1994: 32).

But even if we cannot prove a causal link between certain practices and shared psychological possessions, it does not follow that such shared possessions do not exist. Accordingly, in a second step, Turner proceeds to consider what it would take for them to exist. Here he looks at the constraints on the nature of a possession, asserting that by definition a possession is a thing or substance which requires that it be transmitted or conveyed in some way to the possessor. He states the problem as follows:

To explain how they get to the places they must get to – namely, inside some people and not others – in order to do their explanatory job seems to require an unusual process of transmission. If we conceive of practices as public quasi-objects, they must get from their public location into persons who act in accordance with them. If we conceive of them as dualistic forces, with collective and individual aspects, we are faced with the problem of how they can interact causally both on the collective and individual level. If we conceive of practices as

nothing more than habits, we are faced with the question of how the *same* habits get into different people (pp. 60–61).

Turner concludes that no model of practice can meet the constraint of conveyance and that no account of the acquisition of practices supports the idea that the same internal thing is (or can) be reproduced in another person. Ultimately, then, the beginning hypothesis of practice – the common possession of a tacit object – may be a myth; and after all is said and done the only hypothesis left standing is habituation, ‘the ugly duckling concept of habit’.

If the idea of preserving sameness is removed from the other cases of transmission, they collapse into the case of the acquisition of habits, habits which may vary in internal structure and produce performances that are externally the same, and habits which may produce performances that vary slightly but are sufficiently intelligible or sufficiently predictable for the purposes at hand. (p. 77).

But ‘habits die with individuals’ (p. 78); so what would explain the persistence of certain behaviours on a widespread basis through society, and how do they come to change, once established? Here Turner examines the explanatory potential of notions such as culture, paradigm, and tradition as the locus of practices. He ultimately dismisses the relevance of why practices persist as an issue by suggesting that there is nothing unusual or anomalous about persistence of common practices within a population, since the process of emulation, for example, could on its own lead to the continuance of widespread behaviours.

But if persistence is natural, how does one explain how practices change, especially on a large scale? In social theory, the account of change considers that changes or novelty occur through systemic processes within society as a closed system. Turner examines whether such self-transformation is possible, and points out that systemic frames of reference and mental models which warrant practices in social theory will not move on their own, as this would represent a change in causality. As is the case in formative teleology (Stacey et al. 2000), causality cannot spontaneously change because there is no way to move to a new state beyond that which is already embedded or enfolded in the system. Systemic change can only happen by the action of some mysterious force or accident. Ultimately, Turner rejects closed-system thinking in favour of a more

compelling account of change, which holds that successive small changes can add up to significant difference over time while still preserving an impression of sameness at any given moment.

In the end, Turner turns to a simple account of practice which steers clear of the range of mystical explanations (transmission producing sameness in many people, persistence as anomaly, change as accident) that he finds embedded in the social theory of practice. He gets to a conception of practice as non-foundational and non-fundamental to common manifestations, which in no way requires the presence of a community mind or shared tacit knowledge.

To solve the apparent riddles of persistence and transmission, he turns to the explanatory potential of the acquisition of habits through observances, performance and activities, leading to continued performance.

If acting in accordance with a tradition is acting in accordance with the way of life of a community, and if the way of life of a community includes certain observances, performances and activities, and individual habits and mental habits arise through engaging in the relevant performances, nothing need follow with respect to the causal role or status of practice understood as a kind of collective fact. All that need follow is this: by performing in certain ways, people acquire habits which lead them to continue to perform, more or less in the same ways. Observances cause individual habits, not some sort of collectively shared habit called practice or way of life, which one may possess or fail to possess . . .  
(Turner 1994: 99–100).

Turner ultimately equates practices with habituations, which result in individual publicly observable behaviour, often instigated by simple observances. In this way, practice is not the public manifestation itself. Assuming that many aspects of practice as I describe in this project can be assimilated within the broader notions of social practices that Turner writes about, Turner's position would suggest that when we talk about our practice, in the sense of professional practice or work, for example, we are actually equating and confusing practice as public manifestations of the application of technique or knowledge, with the diverse habituations producing such observable activity.

This reading of Turner raises some important points to be considered. First, it seems apparent that we cannot confidently infer any tacit means of transmission and acquisition of practice resulting in observed behaviour, since we cannot know the processes of practice from within. Second is Turner's suggestion to the effect that it is how practice may be acquired – first by emulation, then by habituation – that defines the concept of practice itself. This latter point has strong explanatory power for my account. Emulation is a process carried out reflexively through interaction with others during cooperative action; a focus on emulation places processes of interaction at the centre of defining practice. This is an important insight which opens up the inquiry into practice to the examination of personal interactive experience. I explore the significance of this conclusion in the next section.

In conclusion, in this section I have turned to Schön and Turner as sources to help commence reflecting on another way of talking about practice. Both Schön and Turner bring the individual in practice into view. Schön presents a thorough portrayal of the reflective processes that may be at work as the practitioner engages in action. Schön's focus on these processes, in particular inner-conversational processes as thinking in practice, is an attempt to know practice from inside the practitioner's experience, locating practice in processes of interaction. As for Turner, he too arrives at a process view of practice, though somewhat obliquely, when he identifies emulation and habituation as the process by which practice is acquired. Attention to processes and knowing from within experience are important themes for the account of practice I am attempting to construct.

### **Return to the narrative**

Let us now reconsider the narrative I presented at the beginning of this project, specifically from the perspective of interactive processes. Throughout the week of activities and interactions described above, I seem to progress fluidly through a streamlined, somewhat sequential process of action from encounter to encounter, from Sunday to Friday. But the narrative also shows that the various encounters are not isolated one from the other. In the intervals between encounters, thoughts of the one just past mingle with anticipation of the one to come. And often one encounter intrudes while another is in progress, as when I received a call from the Rialto representative in my office at PMV.



There is nothing unusual about the succession and intermingling of experiences, whether one is speaking of successive encounters in different domains, as in the narrative, or if the encounters are all within a single working environment. However, none of these encounters (or all of them together) involves or produces the rote application of techniques or specialized knowledge to situations needing solutions, or within preset roles or functions. Processes, like the reflective processes proposed by Schön, are occurring throughout each encounter, as well as in between them.

The tableau of such processes can be widened yet again, to take account of processes of interaction, manifested as conversation. On the face of it, in my portrayal of this one week, conversation emerges as a dominant theme. Notwithstanding that the narrative is written reflexively, bringing out the conversational nature of each encounter as a matter of course, it is nonetheless evident that conversation is central to my way of getting on in the world of organized activity. And since every conversational utterance involves measures of interpretation and rhetoric, evaluatively speaking and choosing not to speak, as I did on at least three occasions in the narrative, there is no such thing as *simple* conversation. Conversation is the enactment of processes of complex lively interaction; it follows that complex lively interaction is also a central aspect of practice, just as both Schön and Turner suggest in the glimpses that they offer of the role of these processes.

I shall return to the consideration of interaction as my research goes forward, exploring various aspects of interaction as it relates to practice in the next two projects. For now, one particular insight about interaction seems important: I am referring to Turner's conclusion that practice is defined by the processes of its acquisition by the individual in interaction, through emulation in the form of observances, performance and activity. In other words, it could be argued that practice is acquired in the doing of it, very much contrary to the Technical Rationality paradigm challenged by Schön. It could also be argued that through this process practice is as likely to change as to stay the same, over time. So during my week of activity, I could be said to be acquiring practice by virtue of all experiences, without hard boundaries, as I live them. While the specifics of such a process remain to be described, this statement does point to practice as being emergent. It is this notion of emergence which is of interest to me at this point.

Emergence is a process that entails dialectical movement, as interacting entities shape and modify one another and are themselves modified or shaped through the same

interaction. In dialectic, two or more entities or constructs are seen as ‘mutually opposed (and often contradictory) but mutually necessary . . . in which each . . . helps to constitute the other’ (Denzin and Lincoln 2000: 578). Nitsun refers to T.H Ogden as seeing ‘the dialectic as a process in which opposing elements each create, preserve, and negate the other: each exists in a dynamic, constantly changing relationship with the other. Neither has any conceptual or phenomenological meaning except in relation to the other. Each relationship has the potential for integration but each potential integration generates a new form of dialectical relationship’ (1996: 204). According to Stacey and his colleagues, “In this movement . . . there is paradox as there is the possibility of sameness, or continuity, and the potential for spontaneous transformation at the same time’ (Stacey et al. 2000: 33).

In order to connect the idea of emergence with my alternative account of practice more substantively, it is necessary to point out where the dialectic is located. The dialectic is lived in every instance of interaction, when the group and I determine our course of action through our palpable engagement with each other in conversation – that is, through words and gestures. The quality and nature of my participation in these conversations is indicative of my practice: as one of my learning set colleagues pointed out after reading my narrative, gestures of persuasion, influence, forcefulness and argumentation are juxtaposed alongside worrying over having too much influence, participating only to suggest alternative ways forward, avoiding usurping responsibility, or waiting until the end, and often holding two opposing positions at the same time.

These attributes of my participation are in fact gestures or acts of argumentation. Therein may lie some further sense of practice. While conversation is a public behaviour, it is sustained by practices of argumentation as thought (Billig, 1991), reflecting a discourse picked up and developed over time. With this in mind, discourse, as a function of argumentation, is also emergent, since argumentation can be dialectical process, ‘seeking out the strongest possible “enemies” of our ideas and entering into a process of rational argumentation with them’ (Midgely 2000: 137). The ‘enemies’ Midgely refers to can exist in our inner conversation as much as in public interaction. Taken in this light, practice may be regarded as encompassing dialectical processes of thought, social interaction and ‘joint action’ (Shotter, 1993), constantly emerging and transforming through experience.

## **Concluding remarks**

The first project ended with an interrogation as to which theories of practice may be reflected in my experience, and how developing them might contribute to a wider and deeper understanding of practice in general. At the beginning of this second project, I have taken up that question by presenting a more detailed account of my portfolio of activities, and then have asked: to what extent do they, together, form a practice? This question is, in fact, a challenge to look more closely at dominant conceptions of practice, and to discern in which ways my practice, as I understand it, is not recognized in the accounts of practice that dominate management literature. In view of these gaps in recognition within the dominant account, my purpose has been to begin constructing an account that better reflects my lived experience.

The way in which I have gone about this entails a particular approach to the use of the literature – warranted, I believe, by my method of bricolage: I have selected Schön's and Turner's significant independent contributions to thought on practice, and have examined these in detail, in the search of resources which may be put to use in the construction of my account. In the two subsequent projects as well, I shall include other such examinations intact in the text. The writing of them was an integral part of my research activities, and they will be essential in supporting my conclusions.

These authors' departures from established ideas about practice point to the need to include in our thought about practice the processes which give rise to observable behaviours, instead of the observable behaviours themselves. Schön has done this quite openly by contesting the Technical Rationality paradigm on the ground that it takes little notice of the practitioner's processes of reflection. Turner, on the other hand, points out that the only way practices can be acquired is through emulation and habituation. This, I believe, defines and locates the very concept of practice within those processes which, according to social-constructionist ontology, are at the centre of the joint formation of social groupings and individuals. This is a position I will maintain and deepen in the rest of this dissertation.



## **PROJECT THREE:**

### **THE FRAGILITY OF PRACTICE**

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Project Two of my research program broadly considered a series of experiences arranged as if they had occurred within a one-week time span so as to give a sense of the variety and flow of activity that my active life comprises. My use of such an overview for reflection and research has made it possible to identify the significance of the processes of interaction that shape individuals and groups to the account of practice I am seeking to develop. The next step in developing this account involves reflecting in more detail on specific experiences in order to clarify how I engage in my active life in terms of the quality and nature of my engagement; and this clarification may then form the basis for research on the relation of such engagement to the nature of practice more generally.

The title of this third project with its particular reference to fragility was prompted by a particular experience I had when a process that I had initiated in my organization took a surprising turn, contrary to my intentions. At the time, I sensed that this turn of events had much to do with the interactions in the room, particularly my own interactions with my principal colleague and superior, which had shifted in the moment from being collaborative to power-based. I was struck by how fragile my whole undertaking was in this experience, and this appeared to be a helpful starting point for a detailed exploration.

Because of the socially-constructed nature of experiences in organizations, it seems that they can dissolve or change into something new at any time. Roles and methods are contingent on the specific interactive circumstances in each case, such that professional identities and social (organizational) roles and the relationships which normally inhere count for little in ordering a situation. In the absence of adherence to conventions of practice, the feasibility and ultimate success of practice may ultimately be related to the quality of the interactive circumstances. It is precisely the content of such interactive circumstances which I will explore in this project.

This paper begins with a narrative account of the experience that prompted this particular exploration. The narrative contains considerable detail, which may appear anecdotal in places; however, I believe it is important to include this level of detail since the writing of it exposed the quality of interactions to examination. It is through this examination that I

could detect the presence of strong emotions affecting the turn of events. I then explore the role of emotions in interaction, particularly with reference to Denzin (1984). From this investigation I conclude that the issue for practice is not the personal experience of emotion, but the role of emotionality – the process of experiencing emotion – as a constitutive aspect of interaction. I then discuss how emotionality contributes to the liveliness of interaction, impeding or encouraging the attainment of sought-after goals, making the themes of emotionality, engagement and liveliness relevant to my account of practice.

### **An emotional experience of practice: Moving Citadel forward**

I had come across a paper on Mark's<sup>5</sup> desk about a conference he was to attend in Savannah, Georgia, USA, put on by the Waterfront Center, an organization which promotes the harmonious and sustainable development of urban waterfronts. Even though there was nothing specific on the conference agenda that would apply to our Citadel<sup>6</sup> project, Mark and I agreed that we should invite our primary consultant group to come along with us (at our cost); this would give us the opportunity for some intensive, unprogrammed time together to reflect on our project. Mark and I had been growing increasingly concerned that the design and program for the project which our consultants had developed so far did not reflect the real potential of the site or what we hoped to accomplish there. In our view, the site called for an innovative project which would capture the geographic and historic richness of the location in building forms and a combination of different uses which would normally be considered too risky for conventional real estate planning and development approaches. We were therefore interested in finding an alternative approach to planning the project.

During this same period, I was still very busy with my volunteer involvement with a large urban and environmental redevelopment project in Toronto. My counterparts there and I were carrying forward a project-definition group process which we had elaborated several months earlier. I felt that this method might be interesting to consider for the Citadel project at its current stage of development. With Mark's agreement, I invited 'Bryce', the principal of the firm working on the Toronto project, to join us for some

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<sup>5</sup> 'Mark is my colleague in the company where we both work, and is the senior person responsible for the Citadel project (see Project Two). ..

<sup>6</sup> 'Citadel' is the name given in this dissertation to a major real estate development project we are undertaking near the Old Montreal waterfront (see Project Two).

exploratory discussions about using the Toronto method on the Citadel project. The discussions turned out to be quite promising: so when we learned that Bryce was to be one of the speakers at the upcoming conference, we booked him in for some of the informal meetings we planned to hold in Savannah with our own consulting team.

During the three days we spent in Savannah, all staying in the same hotel where the conference was taking place, easygoing conversations took place during lunches and coffee breaks on lively terraces, at dinners in good restaurants, and while walking together along the historic Civil War period waterfront, aided by beautiful warm southern sunny weather. At every encounter, the Citadel project was the topic of free-flowing conversation. As our visit was coming to an end, I could begin to see how Bryce's abilities at group facilitation could be useful in helping us move forward towards defining a truly exciting, meaningful project, organized on a more systematic and productive basis.

At a final stop in the hotel bar on the last night, Mark happened to ask what I thought we ought to do next. I had been thinking about this, and suggested that we propose to our group of consultants a process of intensive group reflection on the way forward. We would all participate in the process as interested persons, as if we were free of professional roles and predispositions. The idea then would be to let Bryce, in the role of a friendly but disinterested outsider with no specific part in the project, facilitate us through the process using his skills in process leadership and his knowledge as an architect and planner. Mark warmed to the idea of a process approach and agreed that we should go ahead as I proposed. The following day everyone agreed to give this approach a try.

Shortly after our return to Montreal, a meeting took place with the investors, who brought some new account managers to see the site and to be introduced to the project. The entire delegation was glowing with excitement about the project and was supportive of our proposed way of proceeding. Once they had left the city, Mark now wanted some prompt and concrete action on our part in response to their enthusiasm – some visible signs of movement to bolster their confidence in the project and our management of it. He insisted that we must follow up quickly on the process we had discussed in Savannah.

We convened a meeting of the consultants in our office on Wednesday of the following week. Neither Mark nor I had occasion to speak about the meeting with each other; but without thinking too much about it, my understanding was that it was to be a simple follow-up to Savannah to prepare for the anticipated process. We would bring the current project team together (some new members had been added, while others had not been in Savannah) to discuss the process, get to know each other better and plan our next steps. I planned to prepare an agenda along those lines on the Monday before the meeting.

On Monday, I came down with a flu, and had to go home in mid-afternoon. On Tuesday, I could not get myself out of bed, and spent the whole day sleeping. At one point, Mark did try to reach me, but ended up having to leave a voice message to the effect that he had wanted to know what I had in mind for the Wednesday meeting. If I was going to be too ill to prepare an agenda, he would take care of everything, he said – but he wanted a chance to speak with me before the meeting, if at all possible.

On Wednesday morning, I was feeling only slightly better, but I believed I would be able to attend meeting. I had wanted to get to the office early in order to chat with Mark, but I was still feeling too ill to do so. I arrived at the office just before the meeting was to begin, exchanged a few words with Mark in the hallway, and then together we joined the group. Because of out-of-town travel conflicts, two of the participants had to attend the meeting by conference call; so we had a mix of people present who did not all know each other, and two people on the phone who did not know several of the people present in the room. In all, there were nine people in attendance besides Mark and me; but only Mark and I knew everyone.

The meeting began normally enough: Mark welcomed everyone, and then asked me to explain what we were here for and just what we hoped to achieve. I responded as best I could in my condition at that moment: our meeting's main purpose would be to establish contact, talk about the process we had in mind (which I explained) and open up discussion about a schedule, additions to the group, and any other matters of importance that might arise in the course of the meeting. As I began to speak, it was clear to me – and I believed that it must have been to everyone else – that I was out of sorts: my voice was raspy, and I was groggy to the point of having difficulty putting two words together in a coherent sentence.



I should say that this is far from my usual demeanour in these types of situations. I normally have a fairly commanding presence in meetings, or so I'm told often enough. My confidence in my ability to interact in meetings, especially when I know the people present as was the case here, is such that I can go into such settings relatively unprepared and still be quite effective. But it was not so in this instance. I was not performing well, and I began to sense that the meeting was struggling because of it. I was feeling quite self-conscious about this, though not particularly self-critical or embarrassed: I knew that this was just the first of several meetings to come, and I felt that everyone present, whom I knew personally, would understand.

The meeting limped along: discussion was not particularly lively, and it did not seem clear to anyone really what we were hoping to achieve. We went around the table, giving each person the chance to comment on the challenges as they saw them. But everyone stopped short of saying exactly what they thought about the major issues facing the project, and the conversation seemed to meander around everything and anything except the process we were to carry out. Finally, the senior architect of one of the two principal firms involved— I shall call him 'Harri' — jumped in and suggested we set out once again to come up with new creative design ideas for the project. But the process we were there to undertake had been chosen precisely to get us away from free-wheeling creative design exercises of the sort Harri was proposing. The approach Harri had in mind had already taken us as far as it could go; this meeting and the process we were seeking were about looking for a new departure.

I was very put out by what I believed to be Harri's attempt to sabotage the arrival of a new architectural competitor on the scene, namely Bryce. I was convinced that Harri was playing to his old friend and collaborator, Mark, and at the same time, hoisting his own firm into the lead role on the project.

What happened next surprised and discouraged me. Mark took the bait; he followed Harri's lead enthusiastically and began taking the meeting with him. I was in turmoil. I was moved to speak up against this improvised departure from our agreed-upon process. I spoke as calmly as possible and with as much deference for Mark as I could. But my demeanour betrayed me. In the best of times I am not very good at veiling my emotional state; on this particular morning, with my raspy, hesitant voice and my physical discomfort, I must have looked as if I was ready to explode.

After another couple of exchanges between Mark and Harri, which were not taken up by others in the group, and then a few confused attempts by some of the newcomers to save the day, the conversation came back to me. I said again, in more forceful terms now, that I thought Harri's proposal could not work: 'We've already agreed that what we did before did not work. I don't see why it would work any better now. So are we going to waste more time and money going this route again, to get us – where?' There was silence as around the table; it was painfully obvious to everyone that Mark and I were now at loggerheads.

Mark knew it too, and he went on the offensive. He shot back me: "So what do we do now, besides pout?" I managed not to rise to the insult, and instead I threw the question about what to do next to Bryce, who was participating by phone. Bryce fashioned an answer of sorts, but again Harri intervened, proposing that several new design scenarios be developed. I knew that doing so would contaminate the entire process we were undertaking, and render Bryce's contribution potentially redundant.

Mark again backed Harri's suggestions: he decreed that he wanted new schemes to be produced rapidly, that we should have the first working session of the group within two weeks and commanded that results would have to be presented at that time. His demeanour while he spoke was as telling as I've ever seen: his eyes moved around the table, but his gaze would unmistakably stop at the person next to me, as though he did not wish to acknowledge my presence in the room. This was clearly a power move, intended to make sure everyone there – especially me – knew he was boss. He then instructed everyone present to submit to me a schedule of work and a budget along the lines he had indicated; it would then be up to me to give them the go-ahead. Dates for the next meetings were set, and the meeting came to an end.

I felt deeply humiliated after this meeting – not only embarrassed, but diminished professionally, put in my place and relegated to menial follow-up chores instead of engaged in steering an innovative methodology which could realize the true essence and potential of the Citadel site and perhaps even reshape our own organization. Put simply, I was being told: 'Forget all of this silly innovation stuff, Cameron. Let's get down to "real" work instead.'

## **Examining the experience**

To the conventional real estate practitioner, a group process approach to planning a development project as described above would likely appear improvised and inefficient, bordering on incomprehensible. Real estate development typically deals in the very concrete domain of users, buildings, streets, urban infrastructure and financing. For this reason, real estate planning and development is a field rife with people who present themselves under the authority of professional expertise and accreditation – people, in other words, who normally subscribe to clearly delineated practical approaches, for the most part specific to each professional's area of expertise. Functional roles are always clearly circumscribed. When many such areas of expertise are called into play simultaneously, they will call it a 'multidisciplinary approach'; and indeed multidisciplinary approaches have by now become virtually another domain of professional practice.

While conventional practical approaches are useful in carrying out determinate projects, they are often also attempted in the search for innovative solutions to development problems as well. In such cases, if a conventional approach appears to work at all, it is usually because one lead professional (such as the architect) provides much of the creative input which the others follow in support. This means, in effect, that there is really no group process at all. At one point in the Citadel project, Mark and I had actually entertained the idea of taking on a world-renowned architect (at the same time as we got Bryce involved), but we quickly concluded that this could not lead to the meaningful result we were seeking. In other words, we realized that the true potential of Citadel was, in a certain sense, unknowable (as I shall explain below), so it would have to be either discovered or constructed in some way.

But 'discovered' and 'constructed' are not the same. Discovery implies a way of knowing in which the participants in a process set out with an intuition or hypothesis, which is tested, evaluated and retested repeatedly and iteratively until an answer which is believed to have been lurking somewhere all along is at last found. In the case of real estate development, this way of proceeding would entail doing masses of market and design analyses to identify unfilled gaps in the market and urban fabric which could be filled by the project, and from there designing a strategic response to these opportunities (see Mintzberg et al. 1998). This is a common approach in our field, but only rarely, if ever,

have I seen it lead of its own accord to truly novel and unexpected responses to situations of such high complexity as I considered Citadel project to be.

Constructing a response to a sensed but undefined opportunity, on the other hand, is an attempt to seize and exploit the full complexity of a given situation. Here the term 'construction' takes on a meaning analogous to social construction or joint construction of the future (Shotter 1993; Stacey 2003; Gergen 1999), as opposed to the opposite connotation of the intentional realization of a predefined future project. In the constructionistic view, the outcomes that emerge are specific to a particular situation and meaningful in context. Emergence occurs as people interact in the joint construction of an unknowable future, with the possibility at every turn for transformation and novelty at the same time as persistence and repetition. Since transformation and novelty were sought after in the Citadel project, we had chosen to pursue development of the Citadel concept using an interactive group process.

In referring to interactive group processes and joint construction of an unknowable future as I do here, I am aware that I am using concepts analogous to those of emergence in group processes in order to talk about the development of responses to problems or opportunities in the concrete world. This idea merits a brief explanation. Other than conventional planning methodologies, there are group problem-solving methodologies, often community-based, which can be also used in planning situations. This is what is found, for instance, in prescriptive group methods such as Future Search (Weisbord and Janoff 2000; Shaw 2002), which employ step-by-step staged events of interaction among competing stakeholders, following models of group synergy and organization grounded in systems theory.

There is a marked distinction between such prescriptive methods and what I was attempting at this stage of the Citadel project. My intention was to convene an open-ended process of interaction, with a variety of points of view, to look at the opportunity before us from a broader perspective than those of the planning and real estate professionals. I saw this process as attempting to precipitate face-to-face interaction among experienced and knowledgeable individuals focused on a development opportunity which they all cared about.

Such a process would necessarily demand that the participants divest themselves of claims to the automatic recognition and deference to which they normally feel entitled as professionals when participating in conventional development exercises. In conventional development, the professional's interest in the project is intimately related to his or her professional status, such that there is often no distinction between what is good for the professional *as a professional* and what is objectively good for the project. More often than not, the architect takes over by virtue of the authoritative role he or she plays in the conventional project setting.

In interactive group processes, where professional identities are set aside, as we were trying to achieve, no one person can pretend to have unchallenged authority over any one area or aspect of the project. Participants are expected to accept some lack of order in the relations among them. For the entire process to move towards the desired goal, they are called upon to maintain a personal engagement that reflects their commitment to the project.

In retrospect, I believe the principal reason why I took such strong exception to Harri's intervention was that he appeared to be reverting to a conventional professional role, contrary to the intended process, hijacking the process into a more comfortable and familiar conventional approach, where his influence could dominate.

What I notice further about this encounter is the way the meeting seemed to descend spontaneously into a three-way interaction involving Mark, Harri and myself, leaving everyone else on the sidelines. Until that moment, I had been proceeding as if everyone present fully grasped the idea of the process. But Harri had not been in Savannah with us (one of his firm's junior architects had attended the conference instead) and so it was entirely possible that he simply did not grasp what we were trying to do. Therefore it is not surprising that he stayed primarily in role as a professional architect.

Mark, for his part admitted to me on the day after the meeting that he had not been conscious in the moment that he was effectively undoing the agreement we had made. It is understandable that, having lost sight of our strategy, he sensed the need to take control in his own way as head developer, given the rather uncertain progress being made in the moment and my inability to occupy the space necessary to achieve movement. In view of these alternative understandings of Harri and Mark's behaviour, they may have become a

pair, or dyad, reverting to doing things their usual way as the others watched.

Nonetheless I perceived their actions to be an assault on the process, and I experienced a vivid and somewhat visible emotional reaction as a result.

It is this emotional reaction, in a non-emotional context, which seems important here. All too often we hear that human emotions have no place in the business environment; that we should deal ‘rationally’ with each other and with the issues we confront. However, the intensity of my reaction in the circumstances described above leads me to believe that personal emotions are rather more present in everyday practical encounters than conventional accounts of practice and cooperation acknowledge, and that they play a significant role in practice.

With this in mind, consider the following short narrative of a very ordinary telephone conference.

*Memorandum of a telephone conference*

‘Today, February 8, 2006, we had a conference call concerning a difficult budget situation between the non-governmental organization where I serve as a board member and chair-designate and our largest funder, a European NGO. The subject was the replanning of our board’s retreat weekend coming up in a week and a half, where we intended to bring up the issue of future resource contributions by us to the worldwide system run by the Europeans. This topic would likely be a surprise to my fellow board members. Over the past ten years, they have been mostly passive about the budget. In our relations with the Europeans regarding finances, negotiations take place at the staff level to finalize a draft budget, and the Board merely ratifies the negotiated proposal.

‘We pick up the conversation at the point where we have now decided to hold an extra-day intensive session between staff and board leadership, to include only the Executive Director, three of her staff, the Board Chair, ‘Bruce’ (representing the European side – he is also a senior manager of the worldwide organization), and me. At the extra-day session, we will be deciding how to restructure our organization to meet a serious anticipated budget shortfall, and then to put in motion a renewed effort to augment the resources which we will contribute to the overall system.

‘The call has already been rather long – over an hour, and we are nearing the end of the conversation. Our Executive Director signals that she wishes to make a suggestion. She anticipates that the extra day will be an engaging one, and that we will all want to be involved at all times. She therefore proposes to have ‘Ernie’, a mid-level staffer whose job in the reorganization is not threatened in the anticipated change, sit in on the meeting. First, he could act as facilitator to keep the discussion on track towards a decisive outcome and facilitate full participation. Second, she feels that Ernie enjoys considerable trust on the part of the rest of the organization, and so any hard decisions coming out of the meeting will have greater credibility if Ernie were able to explain outcomes to his fellow staff.

‘My colleagues on the call make various comments, mostly supportive. I am second or third to speak. I say that I feel that it is up to our chair and Executive Director to get us through the day, and that we should be capable of managing that way. Then Bruce calls our attention to the fact that Ernie will have to respect strict rules of confidentiality because of the delicate nature of the discussions. He will not be able to speak to others about what will transpire in the session. This seems to pre-empt the second reason for his being invited into the room. The Executive Director comes at it again, in her ever-so-gently persuasive and thoughtful way. A majority is building in favour of having Ernie take part. Finally, the question comes to me anew as to whether I can live with this in spite of my disagreement. I say that I will rally to the majority decision, but that I am still uncomfortable. I am a little annoyed, but I put it behind me.

‘As the conversation is winding down, the Executive Director makes an impromptu comment in favour of Ernie being part of the process, and there, in the moment, the word “process” catches my attention. I start to imagine what a process might mean in an organization with 30 people. Just what process is she getting at? If there is to be a process, why would Ernie be involved now and no one else?

‘In my opinion, Ernie is not a particularly good facilitator, but all the others appreciate his talents, so I keep quiet about that aspect. However, I feel I must speak up on other matters. I start to speak quite spontaneously, saying I am feeling emotionally perturbed, and that I’m going to think out loud, if they will just bear with me. In the moment I am sensing an emotional rush: some tensing, something like mild anger or stress, I do not know which. In any case, I start raising questions. Is the outcome of our high-level

meeting to be a process or a decisive act of authority? If it is to be a process, why would only Ernie be involved and not the entire staff, or at least a staff delegation?

‘As I talk, I feel increasingly convinced that there are unspoken preconceptions as to what this meeting is about. If they were to be enunciated openly, I might disagree even more emphatically. In fact, as I speak, I am becoming more incensed about this ‘unspokenness’ than I am about Ernie attending or not. I feel that we have to get to the bottom of this: just what process are we referring to so obliquely? How do we know now what is going to come out of the meeting and how we would probably announce it? What am I missing? In the end, everyone rallies to the fact that we are getting ahead of ourselves, that we should keep the meeting to ourselves, and that our Chair will manage the day. We agree that we will get on with the business of deciding how to proceed relative to the rest of the organization when we can see the whole picture.’

But what was it I was feeling in the moment about Ernie’s participation? My question now is: Are such feelings useful? Do they serve any purpose in interaction and in practice? Probably. After all, my rhetorical manoeuvre on the Executive Director’s use of the word ‘process’ did reveal a problem on the horizon, and exposed the presence of something unspoken and perhaps too sensitive to mention at the time – probably the imminent staff cuts which were on everyone’s mind. I sense now that I had let my talk articulate what my emotion was referring to. Once the point was decided, my emotional state subsided. I was satisfied.

### **Emotion and emotionality**

This account of the phone conference is another instance, albeit more subtle and mundane, of the sort of emotion I was feeling when I engaged on the process issue in the case of the Citadel project. I had sensed it right away; but I was also prepared to act on it and I believe that my awareness of it allowed me to risk an argument in which I let my unease do the talking. When I compare this sensation to the emotion I experienced at the Citadel project meeting, I can see that both instances are of a similar nature, reminding me that this happens to me very regularly. At various times I have attributed this reaction to jealousy over power and authority or frustration over lack of recognition. But reflecting on the arousal of such feelings within experiences which I claim to be reflective of my practice, I am prompted to think that they are more complex than jealousy or frustration, and may point to a constitutive link between emotion and practice.



What is this which I am calling 'emotion'? Is it a process or a phenomenon? Is it of the mind or is it of the body? Is it inside me or within my interaction with others? Is it a feeling, or a physical state, or a particular behaviour? Answering these queries will require some exploration.

Elias (1987a) and Denzin (1984) say that emotion is embodied excitement made up of three simultaneous components: physiological affect, behavioural affect and feeling. The physiological component occurs within the body and includes changes in heart rate, blood flow and muscular tension. The behavioural component involves actions we take to discharge the emotion, such as a 'fight or flight' response to anger or fear – a visible display of aggression or aversion. As regards feeling, emotion is an aspect of consciousness wherein we are aware that we feel a certain way – angry, fearful, joyful; moreover, *we are aware that we are aware* of feeling this way, and therefore can exercise some measure of control over the feeling if we choose.

However, neither of these definitions says what emotion *means*. In that regard, Elias (1987a) writes that emotion can take on two meanings. Emotion can signify the feeling component only, which when put at the centre of consideration, gives emotion a causal function for behaviour. A display of emotion is the individual communicating externally that which he or she is experiencing inside. This meaning reflects a spatial conception of the human being, where the true self is hidden deep inside an autonomous corporal entity. Alternatively, emotion can refer to an entire reaction and interaction pattern, including somatic, behavioural and feeling aspects, and is often specific to a situation whether lived in relation to others or experienced in thought.

The difference between the two meanings is important: the first maintains the duality of the autonomous individual interacting with a grouping of other autonomous individuals called the social and places the focus on the individual, even when provoked by others; the second treats emotion as part of processes of interaction in which individuals and the group are forming and being formed at the same time. In this latter view, emotion can be regarded as having a role in such processes of formation. Given the centrality of such processes in the account of practice I have undertaken, in the following pages I will take up the significance of this second view of emotion for my inquiry.

As I have done with the works of Turner (1994) and Schön (1991) in the previous section, I will begin with a similarly detailed examination, this time of Denzin's *On Understanding Emotion* (1984), a major work worthy of close consideration, because it reveals a wide range of ways of seeing emotion. Here, Denzin, who describes his undertaking as 'a social phenomenological and interpretive perspective on the inner and outer worlds of emotional experience' (1984: vii), undertakes a thorough study of emotion and emotionality, seeking to determine how emotionality is lived by people as a form of consciousness.

Denzin proceeds in several clearly delineated steps: a statement of his thesis and his methodology of 'interpretive phenomenology'; a methodical treatment of major contributions to the subject of emotions over the past century, including those of Sartre, Hochschild, Collins, Weber, Durkheim, Marx and Mead, whose ideas he deconstructs so as to detect various strands to be incorporated into his own theory of emotions; an examination of emotional experience through the lens of that theory, starting with the 'inner experience of emotion' and moving into the outer world to the social experience of emotion; a look at problematic emotionality in real life contexts such as family violence; and finally a reflection and conclusion.

Denzin's point of departure in his study is the human subject who is located in a world of intersubjective experience, emotionally, cognitively and interactionally (p. 6). Denzin insists that his goal is seeing, inspecting and studying the interiority of emotion as lived experience. As such, it must be understood from within emotion, which he proposes to do using 'thick descriptions' (Denzin, 1989) of various subjects' emotional experiences, collected in a research project he undertook while writing the book, using elaborate hermeneutic methodologies of interpretation and understanding. Only on rare and brief occasions in the text does he refer to his own experiences of emotion, relying on interpretive methods instead of reflexivity to gain access to experience.

Denzin cites three points of view which could apply to the study of emotion. The interpretive psychological approach seeks understanding from within emotional experience itself. The phenomenological approach studies emotion as a phenomenon in psychology. The sociological or interactionist view locates emotion in the world of interaction. Denzin draws on thought from all three viewpoints, concluding that 'emotional' is the term to be given to a particular mode of consciousness and of being in

the world. His examination culminates in a new conception of emotion in social interaction, leading to a definition used throughout the rest of the book: “‘Emotions are temporally embodied, situated self-feelings that arise from emotional and cognitive social acts that people direct to self or have directed towards them by others’ (Denzin 1984: 49).

For Denzin, the essential pathway in this definition is the self that he calls “‘that structure of experience I call mine’ (p. 51), which arises in interaction. Underlying all aspects of emotion is the idea that emotions are self-feelings, where the referent of the emotion is the self. Emotions always arise in the field of experience, but are directed back to the self, in three increasing orders of reflexiveness: sense of feeling or awareness, sense of the self feeling the feeling, and the revealing of the moral inner deep feeling self to the self. This third order, that of reflexiveness, is the reflexive turn: ‘The self that is revealed to the subject through these feelings [of intersubjective experience], then passes judgment on those feelings, finding them appropriate or inappropriate, morally right or morally wrong, despicable or attractive’ (p. 244; parenthesis added).

At this point Denzin arrives at the crux of his thesis. He marries the reflexive self to the social, whereby every emotion is a social act and every social act is emotional. Denzin maintains that others are always present in emotional experience, and that we call out in ourselves an emotional attitude toward the other and of the other toward ourselves.

Taking up ideas of the self, society and symbolic interaction presented by Mead (1934), he sets up a direct parallel process for emotions as for social interaction in general. He calls this process, analogous to Mead’s process of sociality, ‘emotional sociality’: ‘Once in the field of sharable experience with the other, the principle of emotional sociality suggests that emotional understanding emerges as a social object that is part of the interaction that attaches the selves of the participants to each other’ (Denzin 1984: 140). By sharable experience he means engagement in interaction, and emotional understanding refers to understanding meaning, from within engagement itself. Elias (1987b) takes a similar position, maintaining that emotions are unavoidable in action in the world, and that the presence of emotions indicates engagement in interactive experience. I will refer to the process of emotional sociality as ‘emotionality’.

Notwithstanding his stated focus on interaction and understanding emotion from within interactive experience, Denzin still characterizes emotional sociality as being experienced first inside the person and then moving outward into the world. He writes about the

composition of the 'person' in terms of physical body, lived body and life-world, a social 'unit' emerging from its individual history, who must be 'connected' with the outside world. He takes up Mead in his own way, equating taking the attitude of the other and inner conversation, as posited by Mead, to intersubjectivity, which is the awareness one subject can have of another or of another's conscious states (Denzin 1984: 129). In doing so, he continually regards persons as self-contained 'units', however interdependent, and society as groupings of autonomous persons, missing Mead's central point that mind, self and society are simultaneously-formed aspects of the same processes of communicative interaction, where the embodied nature of these processes includes emotion (Stacey 2001).

Denzin's recourse to such a spatial metaphor may baffle his stated goal to look at experience from the inside, as in 'knowing from within' (Shotter, 1993), but he nonetheless quite significantly makes a convincing case for emotionality as a constitutive aspect of all human interacting. For Denzin, emotionality is present in, if not at the root of, all joint experience in the world. Denzin's thesis opens up inquiry into the role emotionality can play in practice, due to the link he establishes between engaging in joint action in the world and emotion.

Elias (1987a) makes the link between emotion and joint action in groups. He talks of human beings as being bound to each other in figurations, where the individual and the group are defined by the same simultaneously-occurring processes of interaction. The dynamics of these figurations have a constraining and compelling influence on those who form them and on the outcome of the group's action, suggesting that emotionality is an attribute of the group's experience and therefore joint action. Because emotions can change and reformulate themselves at every turn, emotionality ebbs and flows over the course of any given group experience, creating liveliness in the group experience, which is a measure of the quality of engagement occurring within the group. As I will argue later on, the quality of engagement has a direct correlation with the ability of the group to achieve movement as a group, and therefore is relevant to my account of practice.

### **Liveliness in the group**

In the narrative of the Citadel meeting presented earlier, one noticeable aspect of that experience was my weakened physical condition during the meeting. I was all too aware that my condition had a visible effect on my physical composure, in terms of the sound,

intonation and force of my voice, and probably my facial appearance and physical carriage as well. The state I was in also had a significant effect on my ability to conduct the meeting effectively and make my own contribution. It was in that state that I experienced the emotions I describe in the narrative.

Emotions are embodied experiences of consciousness, with elements of physiological sensations and display as they are discharged. Emotions therefore affect one's physical carriage in interaction (Elias 1987b; Denzin 1984; Burkitt 1999). The effect does not stop at the physical boundary of the person, however. By virtue of the gesture-response process of symbolic interaction as described by Mead (1934) as referred to earlier in this dissertation and described in some detail in the next project, how one person engages in interaction will affect the way the other engages in that same interactive experience, which will simultaneously act back on the first person. The experience of interaction will be affected by the ability of the interactants to engage in the interaction, including their physical ability to do so. Given this embodied nature of interaction, which I shall call 'physicality', the quality of physical presence or carriage on the part of the interactants will have an effect on the liveliness of joint action. With this in mind, I think that exploring the physicality of interaction may offer insights into the dynamics of liveliness.

The physicality of interaction is a theme taken up by Goffman, who places interaction at the centre of his analysis of observable human behaviours, offering ways of explaining the patterning of processes of symbolic interaction by the close examination of small manifest behaviours. In *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959) Goffman offers a metaphorical explanatory framework, 'a rhetoric and a manoeuvre' (p. 254) within which to examine facets of human interaction in its multiplicity of levels, symmetries and asymmetries, affects and roles, and language. The book inquires into ethics, moral stance and obligation, character, intention, and ideology, such that, if nothing else, it sounds the depths of the complexity of human interaction as the locus of thought, self, and reality. I shall use Goffman's work to explore the dynamics of liveliness.

Goffman maintains throughout this work that interaction is about individuals intentionally managing their performances and adapting them in interaction, starting with what they think the other expects to witness. Within the engagement process, the interactant, like the performer, uses his or her 'communicative equipment', meaning appearance, gesture and voice, to manage impressions and fulfil the expectations of role

and status. How one arranges oneself for performance becomes the structure of the self. The self emerges over time through a variety of interactions. In local micro-interaction, people manage the impressions they wish to make much the same way that actors do, in an attempt to define the situation of the interaction as they think it should be. This impression management takes the form of physical and symbolic gesturing formulated in terms of the reaction one might expect from the other or others in the interaction.

Goffman's *Interaction Ritual* (1967) is a collection of papers assembled to develop a theory of interaction as ritual: each paper looks at some specific aspects of interaction which, taken together, constitute a form of ritualistic behaviour. Goffman's aim was to explore face-to-face interaction in natural settings – a field study of which had no name at the time but which has since come to be called 'microsociology' (Collins 1981), 'microdynamics' (Westley 1990), and 'microinteraction' (Kemper and Collins 1990). These various names all reflect the focus initiated by Goffman, which is on the very small or micro-situation taking place in the moment. As we will see in more detail in Project Four, 'micro analysis', which rests on the belief that interactive experience is built up of sequential moment-by-moment interactions where minute dynamics play themselves out between the interactants, is one of the principal paths of inquiry initiated by Mead (1934), often referred to as 'symbolic interactionism'.

The analytical boundaries for inquiry into micro-situations are not clear, but Goffman (1967) does suggest that the boundaries must include some kind of brief time span, a delimited space, be limited to those events which must be completed once begun, and involve the co-presence of the participants. During interaction, behavioural materials – external signs such as glances, gestures, positionings, and verbal statements – are put to use. Goffman proposes a close, systematic examination of these small behaviours to arrive at natural units of interaction built up from these materials. From there, he posits that it should be possible to arrive at a normative order of behaviour through ethnographic analysis identifying the countless patterns and natural sequences of behaviour occurring whenever persons come into one another's presence.

The attempt to arrive at a normative order of behaviour is a "sociology of occasions where social organization is the organization of the co-mingling of persons and the temporary interactional enterprises that can arise therefrom' (Goffman 1967: 2), and 'social encounter is an occasion of face-to-face interaction, beginning when individuals

recognize that they have moved into one another's immediate presence and ending by an appreciated withdrawal from mutual participation' (ibid. 99). The study of interaction, then, is not a study of the psychology of the individual, but is instead a study of the 'syntactical relations among the acts of different persons mutually present to one another' (ibid. 2).

As part of his proposal, Goffman develops the notion of impression management introduced in *The Presentation of Self* (1959), fleshing out a relation between deference and demeanour. According to this schema, we play our role in interaction (adopt a demeanour) according to the status we think we have or need to have in order to accomplish the purpose of the interaction. Status can only be obtained from the other through the deference the other accords. Deference cannot be given by oneself to oneself. Here the loop closes in the form of a dialectic between demeanour and deference, as forming and being formed by each other as interaction takes place over time, each acquiring its properties from the other and the properties of both evolving as a consequence of their interpenetration (Burkitt, 1999:12).

Goffman goes on to write briefly about how this relation between demeanour-deference recalls Mead's gesture-response dialectic (1934) in the formation of the self, except that in his opinion Mead's position is inadequate:

The Meadian notion that the individual takes toward himself the attitude others take to him seems very much an oversimplification. Rather the individual must rely on others to complete the picture of him of which he himself is allowed to paint only certain parts. Each individual is responsible for the demeanour image of himself and the deference image of others, so that for a complete man to be expressed, individuals must hold hands in a chain of ceremony, each giving deferentially with proper demeanour to the one on the right what will be received deferentially from the one on the left. While it may be true that the individual has a unique self all his own, evidence of this possession is thoroughly a product of joint ceremonial labour, the part being expressed through the individual's demeanour being no more significant than the part conveyed by others through their deferential behaviour toward him. (Goffman 1967: 84-85)

Both the Mead and Goffman positions maintain the interdependence between what we are projecting to others, and what the other is projecting to us, as a dialectic. Others project to us based on how they perceive our projection and anticipate our reactions, and that incites us to project as we do. For my purposes here, this means that if I require deference or recognition in order to maintain the demeanour necessary for the role I seek to play, for instance, as a manager, and I can only get recognition or deference from another, then I will try to adapt my behaviour to the requirements of the other, as I understand them, to get the deference I seek. I can only do this by anticipation and inner role playing as I am formulating and putting forth my demeanour.

The various moves within this dialectic are not necessarily passive or reactive; they are worked at. Goffman (1967) obliquely refers to this fact when he talks about ‘face work’ – what we do in face-to-face interaction to keep face, save face, and give face, in order to participate in and keep the interaction going. Hochschild (1983) likewise talks about ‘emotion work’, by which she means the managing of one’s emotions – suppressing or calling them up depending on the circumstances – so as to conform to the feeling or framing rules which one senses must apply to a given social occasion. Face work and emotion work are integral to engagement and to keeping interaction moving and lively. The reference to work in this context is pointing to engagement in interaction, as one can equate effort expended (work) and level of engagement.

This reference to work also offers a specific take on power. My need to be recognized by others in order to exist fully as a self gives these ‘others’ power over me. And yet, how they choose to recognize me is in turn a result of what identity my actions effect in them. The effort or work I invest to gain this recognition is a measure of the power others have over me, and the intensity in the response to my provocation that occurs within the other is a measure of my power over the other. The difference between the two power positions signifies the relative power balance between us. It follows that one measure of power in interaction is to be found in the amount of work one does to stay engaged in the interaction. For example, Hochschild (1983) demonstrates a direct correlation between the work women invest in their demeanour and the attainment of status in male-dominated environments.

Goffman’s observations and proposals offer valuable insights into the dynamics of liveliness. Although they are inferred from observed physical behaviours, these insights



have a definite resonance with experience as portrayed in the narratives included in this project. Practically speaking, Goffman's thought points to aspects of interaction which we seek to remain conscious of reflexively during interaction, such as paying attention to the effect of our demeanour on others and theirs on us, and noticing the link between the physicality of interactive experience and the liveliness necessary for the group to achieve its aims. Noticing this link also raises the question of the effect the state of liveliness would have on the physical comportment and emotions of the interactants themselves.

### **Non-liveliness**

In the previous section, I have been writing about emotionality and the nature and dynamics of liveliness in experiences of joint action. Of course, although liveliness can be achieved in a group experience, it can also be lost once it has been achieved, making it a fragile constituent of joint action. Consider the following example of loss of liveliness which took place during a routine conversation in our DMan learning set in Israel in December of 2005.

#### *Abu Ghosh*

This was our second day together as a group and the first day of learning set work. Our first day together was spent in visiting the Old City of Jerusalem and having a lively dinner together at the home of our host, C., in Nataf, a neighbourhood just outside the town of Abu Ghosh, not far from Jerusalem. The conversation at this first dinner focused mainly on arguing philosophies and issues of educating young boys and men sparked by some of the thinking and beliefs held by M., a school master and one of our learning set members, about such matters

After a good day's work on the second day, we decided to go into Abu Ghosh for supper. The five of us were tightly seated around our table, enjoying an excellent spread of food and wine. Conversation flourished, as it always does with us – this time having to do with the propriety of what one particular biographer had done with his famous wife's memory in publishing his own memoirs. I did not know of this author or his wife and was not of a mind to have any particularly strong opinion, but it was our group's topic of conversation at the time, all of the others seemed quite engaged, and that was fine with me. I knew that if at any point I was not satisfied with my experience in the moment, I was free to speak up and try to influence the course of our talk.

At a certain point long into the conversation, C., seated to my left, did just that. Up until then she had been quite quiet, but something that was being said at that moment provoked her to the point that she perked right up and said that *now* she was going to get involved. Great, I thought, and my attention perked right up too. Then something took place that riles me whenever it happens: the group suddenly broke into two completely separate conversations. On my left, C. and M., seated directly opposite each other, continued with the same subject as before. Meanwhile, to my right, a conversation about student affairs started up between one of our classmates, R., and our supervisor, P. This new conversation was clearly private, so that for me to show any attention and interest would look like eavesdropping. So instead I tried to pay attention to the two-way harangue now raging between C. and M., though I had not had much to say about the subject in the first place. I could see no easy way in to that pairing; even the body positions - head, shoulders, eyes - of the two speakers were intently addressing each other, and so I ended up sitting silently pondering one thing and another to while away the time.

This went on for some time in fact, and I got increasingly frustrated with the whole experience as the evening wore on. I could not leave the restaurant because of particular travel arrangements we had made to get back home together. At certain points along the way, M. must have sensed that I was not particularly engaged - or perhaps he too wanted to change the subject - because he would address me directly to see what I thought about one thing or another that had come up in the discussion. When I had no response to offer, he and C. would instantly re-engage on the same subject as before.

Admittedly, I could have objected to how the table conversation had broken down, but for some reason I did not, as often happens with me in similar circumstances. Instead, my reaction was to tune out, resign from the conversation and retreat into my own solitude.

Although there may seem very little unusual about this as a social encounter, what I experienced as the conversation diverged and turned into two more or less private discussions was a loss of liveliness in our group as a group. The mode of participation spontaneously shifted away from the simultaneous interaction among five people to three separate forms, requiring one member - myself - to make some attempt to take control by interrupting, butting in, imposing myself, until the group interaction would have been restored or until some general shift of attention would have drawn each of us back into an engaging interaction as a group. The liveliness as a group of five had gone out of the

interactive moment, and to get it back was too much work to invest under the circumstances. This meant that even though some may have been enjoying a lively dyadic interactive experience and a generally very enjoyable evening, it was clear that there was no longer any movement possible for us as a group, without a considerable amount of investment from one or the other of us to get back on track.

Thinking back to my first narrative, this description of Abu Ghosh might just as easily be a portrayal of the outcome of the Citadel project encounter. There too the group interaction had completely lost its liveliness, and the result was that no forward movement on the project was then possible. In contrast to these two examples, the NGO group conversation portrayed in the second narrative remained lively and focused, and movement was achieved.

Goffman maintains that conversational encounters are where society's work gets done (1967: 136). They entail the joint spontaneous involvement in the moment – a co-presence – on the part of participants, where the interaction underway is the main focus of cognitive attention and the current talker is the main focus of visual attention, where there is called forth and sustained a 'little social system' (ibid. 113) with its own boundary-maintaining tendencies. Engaging in conversation comes with obligations which are considered mutual in that we embark on a continual flow of gesture-response which requires that we maintain our own involvement and ensure that of others by being able to take the role of others and adapt our own conduct to that, and expect and offer reciprocity.

In the Abu Ghosh experience, the members of the group had relinquished their obligations to remain involved in a common purpose and to ensure that others remained involved as well. The result was a complete loss of liveliness, and, I argue, the loss of the capacity to accomplish any common purpose as a group. This loss of liveliness also had an effect on me emotionally, as one participant.

### **Liveliness in practice**

With the preceding look into Denzin's work on emotionality and Goffman's studies in micro-interaction, it is possible to see the great extent to which the liveliness in group or joint action entails complex dynamics of dialectical gestures and responses in the moment, as participants work to gain and maintain engagement. These dynamics are not

merely mechanical in nature; behind them are the emotionality and physicality characteristic of engagement in joint action.

Returning now to the experience reflected in the Citadel story, it becomes possible to point out certain attributes of practice. The process set in motion by that meeting was intended to precipitate results that could not be known at the outset. The project was in need of novelty, which had not been forthcoming within our approach up to that point. A sort of 'stable instability' was needed (see also Marion 1999; Pascale et al; 2000), within which opportunities for surprise and novelty could open up in continuity with the work done to date and the understanding which had been developed over the preceding months. Stable instability is inherent in the conditions of interaction with a high degree of liveliness, but the liveliness contains risks for its own disintegration, producing a degree of fragility in the undertaking.

At this point, I can begin to see my practice entailing in some measure being part of, creating and maintaining the conditions of interaction with the greatest possible liveliness. This requires engagement of me as a whole person. As in the Citadel example, my work places me within the interaction taking place, to the same extent as any other participant engaged in the process. I am subjected to the interactional dynamics as embodied experience as much as any other participant. In addition, as instigator, convenor and conductor of the exercise, I also have the obligation to make sure that the interaction remains lively. I see my practice therefore as being related to my capacity to engage in lively interactive experiences, a capacity acquired over a career-spanning portfolio of engagement. However, I also see an inherent fragility in practice looked at in this way, contingent as it is on the physicality and emotionality of the dynamics of interaction.

### **Concluding remarks**

I ended Project Two with the conclusion that practice may be regarded as encompassing dialectical processes of thought and social interaction, constantly emerging and transforming through experience. This conclusion oriented the next stage of research and reflection towards a close examination of the processes which give rise to observable behaviours in organized human activity.

In this third project, I have examined these processes from the point of view of emotionality, prompted by the emotional quality of the experience of practice related in the Citadel project narrative. Emotionality, or emotional sociality as Denzin (1984) describes it, is necessary for engagement in 'joint action' (Shotter, 1993) and therefore must figure in any true account of practice. The presence of emotionality on the part of all participants creates situations of liveliness in experiences of joint action. The dependence on liveliness for the group to be able to progress in its enterprise makes progress fragile because of the fragility of liveliness itself.

The embodied nature of emotions points to the physicality of interaction and of the liveliness of joint experience. Some useful insights into the dynamics of liveliness have been gained from looking closely at physicality, which Goffman (1967) does through his treatment of the role of deference and demeanour among participants in interaction. The enactment of the dialectic between deference and demeanour necessary for effective and lively joint action, which Goffman relates to local conversation and micro-interaction, requires work, signifying engagement. Reflection on these dynamics affords some understanding about how liveliness is maintained or lost in joint action, and its effects, offering further insight into the nature of practice.

Taking specific experiences of emotion and physicality seriously, as I have done in this project, has provided themes for reflection. I have also used a detailed examination of Denzin and Goffman to provide material for further inquiry of these themes. The next step in the dissertation leads to an examination of role as a component of practice. As I described in my narrative of the Citadel project, I acted as the instigator, convener and conductor of the process we had undertaken as a group. I alluded to this as holding a role in the process, akin to that of a manager. The next project will look specifically at the relation of role to practice.



**PROJECT FOUR:**  
**PRACTICE AS ROLE ENACTMENT IN ORGANIZATIONS:**  
**HOLDING BOTH SYSTEMS AND**  
**COMPLEX RESPONSIVE ORGANIZATIONAL VIEWS**

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Project Three has brought my inquiry to the point of substantiating an account of practice as being grounded in processes of interaction inherent in joint cooperative action.

However, this account is not yet specific enough, since it could be taken in broad terms to deal with anything and everything having to do with life and living in general. This is a danger. It is true that I object to my active life being pinned down by others as comprising one named role, function or job (or worse, being called by a name such ‘architect’ or ‘real estate developer’, with their connotations of merely conventional practice and embedded stereotypes), my discourse ought not to suggest that the notion of practice concerns simply how I, and only I, act in a given situation – as if each such situation must accommodate my way, without its own reciprocating set of constraints.

Of course, such unilateral responsiveness is highly unlikely. In fact, I am always acting in situations that are partially defined by others, and no active life would be possible if this were not the case. Indeed the very case for engagement and liveliness I have made in Project Three argues in favour of some form of mutual accommodation taking place. Reflecting on this assertion points to a specific question: am I actually being pinned down, after all, in spite of my wishes and claims to the contrary? It seems that admitting that this is at least a possibility should help free my inquiry from the constraints I have placed on it until now, and open up the account so as to be more recognizable and inclusive of others besides myself.

Situations involving joint action have some form of definition to them from the outset, which acts as a constraint on the involvement of the participants (Habermas 1984). One aspect of this definition are the situation-specific roles attributed by the various players to each other and to themselves. With my own engagement in practical situations in mind, it could be said that I am at the very least taking up a role at the specific moment when interaction begins. Pursuing a portfolio-type active life as I suggest I am doing would mean that I am frequently and regularly taking up roles in new and different

circumstances. It follows that the very taking up of roles is part of my practice, and that this realization warrants some investigation in order to complete my account of practice.

The exploration I undertake in this fourth project entails an examination of how roles are taken up. Are they fixed constraints on engagement in joint action? Or are they shaped over time, and if so, how? I shall illustrate these questions by a reflection on my experience of taking up the role of chair of the board of directors of the Canadian NGO CFD mentioned on various occasions in this dissertation, which was ongoing at the time of writing. I begin with a narrative of that experience, detailing what transpired from the moment of assuming the chairpersonship of the organization through a trip to visit programs of the organization in Africa then back to Canada. I also include events occurring at the same time in my paid work as head of the Citadel project.

The narrative contains a significant amount of detail covering a period of one month. I felt that writing at this level of detail and broader time scale was necessary in order to adequately reflect on the experience. The narrative is also presented without interruption, or direct comment on certain themes which come into view at particular points. These themes are however discussed in the subsequent reflection and analysis, which considers my month's experience as an account of role enactment

This discussion will make specific reference to role theory as put forward by Sarbin and Allen (1968). The theme of engagement, which was developed in Project Three, points to role enactment as more than rote fulfilment of purpose, and brings into view a problematic lacuna in how enactment is accounted for in role theory. This lacuna calls into question the conventional understanding of the very nature of the constructs that support Sarbin and Allen's role theory, namely role and organization.

In order to circumscribe and deal with this deficiency, I draw a parallel between role and organization, on one hand, and the individual and the social, on the other. I then examine in detail three different ways of thinking about the individual and the social. The first way considers the individual and the social to be organized spatially in a series of levels interacting with one another (Wiley 1994). The second way deals with many of the same issues in terms of processes of interaction ritual and interaction ritual chains (Collins 2004). The third way concerns the processes of communicative interaction (Stacey 2003) which result in the simultaneous emergence of mind, self and society.



I surmise from this examination that taking these accounts seriously problematizes the enactment of roles in organized human activity as being constrained within expectations of role enactment emanating from the spatial view of the world, at the same time as being experienced as self-organizing through processes of interaction. I am then able to reflect on the implications of the problem crystallized in this way, and to bring those implications into my account of practice.

### **Into the chair of CFD Canada**

On June 24, 2006, after three years of membership on the board of directors of 'Citizens for Development Canada' (CFD), I became chairperson. As mentioned in earlier projects, this organization is part of a federation of similar organizations which places individuals into development roles within partner organizations in over 30 countries around the world. The following narrative recounts my first few weeks in this role, starting with the moment of becoming chair, through my participation at a meeting of the CFD world federation board in London by virtue of holding that position, and then on to an eight-day visit to visit CFD volunteers in their placements in Kenya and Uganda. As this story was unfolding, my work situation as the head of the Citadel project continued to evolve, as did other board memberships in a variety of other organizations.

My becoming chair of the board of CFD Canada happened without fanfare, within the space of a few moments at the beginning of our incoming board's first meeting. The outgoing chair supervised the voting for new officers, and I was slotted to the position of chair. At that moment, however undramatically, I was expected to move from being an ordinary board member to taking charge as control the meeting was passed to me for the rest of the agenda.

So what did I do? In terms of overt behaviour, it was pretty straightforward: manage the flow of the conversation, set the stage for each new agenda item, call upon staff to present an item or recognize a first speaker – all typical of any description of the role of chair. But while these acts describe *what* I did, they fail to account for the experience of taking up the role of chair. Upon reflection, I remember that I felt some anxiety that I would not perform up to par in the eyes of my colleagues, staff and trustees alike. I had to cope with this emotion. As I often do in such circumstances, I resorted to humour and improvised some light-hearted introductory remarks to elicit laughter from the group. A round of playful teasing and good humour followed; I felt my self-confidence grow, and

sensed that I was off to a good start. The rest of the meeting went well and we adjourned until our next meeting scheduled for the fall.

Two days later, fresh from my induction into the chair of CFD Canada, I was back in Montreal at my paid duties, as the person responsible for moving the Citadel project along. My impending departure for a planned two-week visit to London for a CFD international board meeting and thereafter Africa brought a sense of urgency about making certain decisions that were pending for the project. The project needed a more formal organization in place, to oversee the work of coming up with plans and budgets and obtaining regulatory approvals. Although its current organizational setup was only provisional, I was nonetheless acting as if I had already been named to the position of general manager – handling relationships with our investors, initiating marketing activities and instructing a bevy of consultants and suppliers already at work. In anticipation of officially being named to the post, I had already begun unofficially recruiting for the various positions of the organization I had in mind to create, had selected an office location and had had layouts done for it.

I had put a description of my intentions in a draft memo to the ownership decision-makers a few days before I was scheduled to depart for Africa, requesting that they quickly agree to my budget and overall plan. The reply to my request indicated that there was some confusion over who amongst the partners was to take on which responsibilities in the project, and that any further considerations regarding organization would have to await my return. I realized then that I had been acting as if there was general understanding about the organizational setup to come, only to become suddenly aware that this was not the case. There was no time to deal with this matter any further, as then I was off to London.

Leaving Montreal, I had much on my mind: Citadel's latest goings-on and reams of unfinished business; a DMan Progression Viva exam to take place almost upon arrival in London; and my first international board meeting of the CFD federation, followed by the trip to Africa. I can remember the sequence of small gestures of leaving: a harried departure from the office at the last minute and the cab ride home; packing, chatting and goodbyes; the cab to the airport, urgently passing through security just to sit and wait; the restless night flight thinking, daydreaming, worrying, dozing; and then arriving at Heathrow – take the bus to Gatwick and a cab to Roffey on the night before the viva

(which came off without incident and turned out to be a very positive experience). As I think about this journey, I recall the inner conversations and interactions as where and what I was leaving behind faded from consciousness, making place for the anticipation of what might be coming next. I sense that these passages of small gestures and events play a significant role in how one moves from one experience to another in active life. We take them for granted, yet they warrant reflection for the role they do play, as I will discuss later in this project.

### CFD International Board of Trustees

Back in downtown London fresh from my viva, the day before the CFD International Board of Trustees meeting, I lunched with 'Bruce', a senior manager with the CFD federation. We were meeting at my request so that I could get his insights on what I should expect on my trip to Africa – especially pointers on avoiding the risks of physical illness during my stay. However, Bruce decided to fill me in about an issue brewing, regarding a report to be brought forward to the international board the next day, concerning the future of relations between two CFD organizations working in Kenya, which was precisely where in Africa I would be heading first.

The object of the report was collaboration (or lack of it) between KFD, the independent Kenyan CFD partner agency akin to CFD Canada, and CFD Kenya, which is an in-country CFD federation programming office reporting to London. The report had been authored by 'Mathenge', the quiet, wise chair of the KFD board and member of the CFD International Board of Trustees; and by a figure I shall call 'Sir Alex', a peppy go-get-'em Londoner who is also a board member. I had read the report but had not reacted strongly one way or another to its conclusions, which were that the two organizations should merge. But I had felt critical of the quality of the report, in particular its 'us and them' tone and lack of any rich detail. I thought that I might voice my criticisms at the meeting, if the opportunity arose.

At the Board meeting, there were about twelve members in attendance and four senior managers including the chief executive. The atmosphere was jovial and lively. I mostly sat and listened. When the time came to discuss the report, it was Sir Alex who made the presentation; Mathenge was silent throughout save for a short statement later on. After describing the situation in the organizations with a certain flair bordering on flippancy,

Sir Alex stated authoritatively: ‘The problem is a structural one, and requires a structural solution. Either the two organizations should be completely separated or they should merge, and merger seems to be the only solution which makes any sense in the long term.’ There he goes, I thought. No messing about; let’s just go ahead and merge them.

For me, two issues arose in light of his position. First, the content of the report was flimsy. Second, Sir Alex’s grandstanding rhetoric was devoid of inquiry, authoritarian, and obfuscating in that it almost explicitly sought to forbid further and deeper reflection by the group. I felt that board members, including me, were being shut up, pushed out of the debate by a play apparently intent on ramming a particular solution through. Many thoughts went through my mind. Had this issue been brewing for some time, informally, in the corridors or otherwise, unknown to me? Who among the CFD the power structure might be complicit with this approach? Had Sir Alex been prompted? If I spoke, was I going to seem like a freshman, an innocent newcomer having to have it explained to him what the ‘real’ issues were that had initiated the report in the first place, which surely I would refrain from questioning if only I understood them? I was conscious of the potential for embarrassment, and my anxiety over speaking began to grow.

I was worrying over how and when I would actually speak when Michael, to my immediate left, jumped in. He is a jovial, long-time Board member, a former international planning consultancy associate and now a doctoral student in business. He is also an intellectually generous man, who has gained the respect of the Board over the years for his insights into organizational matters. It was obvious from his way of speaking within this group that he enjoyed considerable respect. I assumed that this was because he is recognized both as an insider within the group and as an expert in organizational management. As it turned out, Michael’s intervention was not taken up *per se*, but it did have the effect of opening up conversation. For me, speaking up became much less daunting. When my turn came I did jump in, and laid out my concerns to the effect that too much detail was lacking for the board to adopt a final position too quickly.

In the end, Sir Alex was left somewhat hanging. The discussion which had opened up was threatening to become a full-blown debate, so in the mind of the Chair we were not ready for a decision. The issue was taken under advisement by the senior management team to come back to a future agenda after other alternatives were more diligently explored. The agenda item on Kenya wrapped up with some joshing. It came up that

because of my impending trip, I would be the first member of the international CFD organization to set foot in Kenya following this discussion. Certainly I would be pressed by the local leadership and the rank-and-file with whom I would come into contact to tell them the upshot of the discussion that had taken place in London. With this turn on the conversation focused on me, I now felt engaged and included. I had moved beyond the inertia of my position on the edge and was now able to engage in this new group. I had engaged and had been recognized.

This experience cast my trip to Africa in a significantly new light for me. Now, in addition to the first-hand experience in the field I was hoping to get in order to substantiate my CFD Canada chairpersonship, there was a basis for looking, seeing, talking, listening – that is, interacting substantively with others whom I would meet but did not know yet other than as names on an itinerary. As a trustee, I would now be sharing at least one significant enterprise with some of these people, namely the restructuring of CFD in Kenya, which I felt added meaning to being a trustee in these particular circumstances.

The next day it was time to move on. Another marked passage: a flurry of activity to get to Heathrow from the CFD offices in central London; an overnight flight to Nairobi, dozing fitfully, pondering the eight-days' journey looming before me, now coming into much sharper focus. As one visiting Africa for the first time, I was also struggling to rid my mind of preconceptions of dangerous drinking water, invasive parasites and pity-provoking misery. Although, after the London experience, I had something more specific to look forward to, I still did not know what I would say, how I would act and interact, what the local customs were, what idea people had about me being there, how I would be received, how I would look after myself. It all felt dangerous, lonely, and endless. I found myself now and again seriously questioning the wisdom of this journey, and here and there longed to be heading home instead.

### Africa

I arrived at Nairobi's Kenyatta Airport early on a Thursday morning. Samuel, a taxi owner-driver hired by CFD-Kenya to pick me up, was waiting to take me to my hotel. We chatted easily on the way, about the weather, the roads, his work with CFD-Kenya and the volunteers who come here, why I was here in Kenya, and so on. The dry

landscape passing outside the car windows moved from rugged rural to ragged urban as we rolled along crowded roads, rough but paved, with low clouds of dust rising from the footpaths on either side, teeming with people walking towards their jobs in the city. Once in town, we arrived at the Fairview Hotel, a colonial-type layout where one would expect to come across an inordinate number of expats.

I bedded down for a couple of hours, then freshened up and headed out to my first meeting, not quite sure at all what to expect. Down in the courtyard, the head of KFD, whom I shall call 'John', arrived to take me for a lunch. I found John to be quite charismatic: tall, fit, outgoing and self-assured. Right off, we had things to talk about – my arrival experience, the people back in London, even John's visit to Ottawa for a local CFD meeting over a year before at the same time as I had been there for another CFD meeting, although we had not met at that time. Having readily established familiarity, we eased into discussing Sir Alex's report. I spoke candidly, sharing unsolicited my misgivings about what I had heard at the board meeting in London two days earlier. John, for his part, freely shared his own and his colleagues' discontent over the tone of the written report, which they felt did not fairly reflect the tenor of the conversations that had taken place with the authors, in particular Sir Alex.

Now here was a solid connection. We shared the same criticisms, so it was easy to commiserate, empathize, as if I were an insider – as indeed perhaps I was now. It was not difficult to pile on criticism of the report, pick on those who were far away, collude with this fellow critic. Was I ingratiating myself, to win my way into his confidence, possibly at the expense of those others back in London? Perhaps so; but we certainly did get on well, and this was bound to be helpful locally.

Then John explained the activities of his organization to me in some depth, and particularly his recently adopted strategic plan. I shared CFD Canada's recent experience with our strategic plan. I suppose I must have pontificated a bit about my thoughts on the limited utility, if any, of strategic plans, but I must have made a few interesting points, for John asked me to critique his plan, insisting that we meet again to discuss it before my departure from Nairobi the following week.

The next day and a half covered lots of ground. I met with KFD staff. On the Thursday night of my arrival, I dined with 'Joseph', the comparatively low-key senior manager of

the CFD program delivery office for Kenya. Friday, I had lunch in downtown Nairobi with three development workers – two Canadian and one Dutch – who bombarded me with their story of the difficulties they experienced in their placements, blaming CFD Kenya staff incompetence for their misfortunes. I wondered if they were playing up their difficulties to an outsider because they thought (as one of them said) that I was there to evaluate CFD Kenya, based on what they had understood had been the purpose of the report.

Sunday morning I left the by-now familiar urban surroundings and comfortable hotel in Nairobi into the distant countryside to Kitui, a township in the east-Kenyan countryside three hours away by car-swallowing pot-holed roads, arriving in the market town – a crowded, somewhat haphazard agglomeration of one- and two-storey painted-cement buildings – around mid-afternoon. In Kitui, I was received by ‘Annie’ and ‘Marie’, two American volunteers recruited through CFD Canada, and two other CFD operatives. After a very convivial supper at Marie and Annie’s house, I returned to my rudimentary but adequate hotel room down the road, where I lay in bed staring anxiously into the darkness beyond the medicated mosquito netting and anticipating with a mixture of excitement and dread my visitations the next morning, with the forced and awkward socializing with complete strangers that was bound to take place.

### Meeting the Grass Roots

On Monday morning, we started with a visit to ‘Kitui Youth Polytechnic’ (YP), one of three making up Annie’s placement, located within a half-hour dirt non-road radius of Kitui, riding shotgun on a skittish dirt bike or *piki-piki*, as they are called there. Youth polytechnics are community-based organizations that endeavour to teach skilled trades to post-primary teenagers. This training takes place under the most rudimentary of conditions: the classroom is four walls and a roof, often without electricity; there are only a few desks or worktables, and extremely few teaching tools, consisting mostly of reused materials. Adolescent students come from the surrounding villages, and often live on site in dormitories without electricity or running water. Sanitation facilities are typically pit latrines. The students and kitchen lady fetch water and firewood as needed for cooking and washing.

At the second YP in the afternoon, the manager, whom I shall call 'Mr K', with other members of his management committee and staff present, began the meeting. We were in the management office, furnished with rickety chairs uncertainly dealing with my weight, a recuperated desk and a metal filing cabinet of a sort not seen in North America for the past few decades, all lit only by the small window behind Mr K. He spoke softly in heavily-accented but very good English. Every now and then he would have a brief exchange with his colleagues in Kiswahili to clarify what he should say next. The kitchen lady brought us sweet milk-and-sugar tea.

Mr K had prepared a presentation for me on the activities, data and projects of the YP. All I had to do was listen – easier said than done: my anxiety over the constant threat of falling ill, the shyness I always feel in such encounters, my self-consciousness of the evident physical contrasts – me a 'soft', portly white person, and my Kenyan counterparts without exception slim, gentle black people – all made it difficult to think straight. While trying to overcome Mr K's heavy Kenyan accent and soft voice in the dim light of his tiny office where it was even difficult to distinguish his facial expressions, I was intensely preoccupied with coming up with an intelligent, if not engaging, response. It was one of those times when my self-awareness is so acute that the biggest challenge seemed to be present in the encounter at all; to get out of my self-absorption and into the moment; to be with the people who were receiving me, who, by the way, may have been feeling just as anxious about the whole situation as I was.

As the presentation shifted to a question-and-answer session about many of the details in Mr K's report, I felt movement arising. As we continued on together, I could begin to hear echoes of personal histories in our exchanges. So I asked questions of this sort: 'You know, I'm a board chair myself in Canada, and I do that because I learn new things and meet people in new situations, and hopefully make a contribution to my community. What made you get involved in chairing the management committee? How did that come about?' Or: 'I'm an architect, and I know how valuable trades-people are. Do your students go on to work on big projects in the city?'

My hosts responded enthusiastically with their personal stories, and one subject began to lead to another. I could feel our persons being brought into the moment, family life, other activities as volunteers, trustees, job-holders, and now I felt I could have a good time. There was felt engagement – humour, empathy, and argument. At one point, the treasurer



offered me, with a twinkle in his eye, an African name: Musyoka, which is Kiswahili for 'he who returns'. I was touched by the warmth in the gesture and especially in the teasing which came along with it. I knew at this point I was finally beginning to feel that I was turning a corner. I started looking forward to further encounters.

Back in Nairobi later in the week, I found John anxious to meet me and hear my comments on his strategic plan. I had read the plan very carefully and I was excited to have the opportunity to comment on it. John and I had an excellent exchange on its strengths and weaknesses. I also took the opportunity to share with him my concern over how CFD-Kenya was actually faring in some of the programs I visited, a caution in light of CFD-Kenya's upcoming merger of his organization and.

My trip to Africa ended two days later after a stop in Kampala, Uganda, where I was able to meet twice with the CFD Uganda staff body and executive director and take in two stellar projects working on HIV and AIDS treatment, de-stigmatization and prevention in and around Kampala. As I anticipated my return to Canada, I knew I had a new understanding of what CFD was all about, having gained insights into the complex workings of its worldwide network of program offices and their partners, who receive development workers in the field. I did not yet have a sense of how this could affect how I would now play out my role as CFD Canada chair and as trustee of the federation board, but I was sure that it would crop up in many different ways over time.

Now, seeing in my mind's eye my family and job waiting for me in the familiar and easy surroundings of home, I looked forward to the long flight back, free of the anxieties and doubts I had experienced en route to London and Africa. I returned to Montreal on July 21, rested over the weekend and showed up at the office on Monday, July 24, one month to the day after my induction as CFD Canada board chair. In the immediate offing for August 2 was the important Citadel project summit meeting which I had arranged before my departure, to get my organizational structure and budget approved. On the evening of August 1, the night before the meeting, I was told by the lead investor in the project that the investors' group considered me to be essential to the advancement of the project for the next few years, and that at the important meeting to take place the following morning they would move to have me named general manager of the new development company we were setting up. In that role I would create the new organization and work directly for that company reporting to its operating board – a new organization, a new role.

## **What's in a role?**

As I experienced the events described in the preceding narrative, I could also sense the passages as I moved from one episode to another, and these sensations were heightened all the more by the major changes of location such as London to Nairobi or Nairobi to Kitui. In writing about and reflecting on all of these experiences, it occurred to me that the narrative was an account of taking up the roles called 'chair' and 'general manager', within named organizational setups called 'CFD' and 'Citadel'. This lead me to ask: doesn't all cooperative action entail the playing of roles? Perhaps it does; but caution is in order here. If cooperative action necessarily entails role playing, then wouldn't cooperative action be about the division of labour after all, in line with the circumscription of predefined roles? But such a simplistic conclusion would challenge the premise of my work in this programme, and so it seems quite in order, before arriving at such a conclusion, to examine the notion of roles in some depth: what they entail and how they are taken up.

Sarbin and Allen define the term 'role' as denoting a preset position or unit in the social structure coming with expectations that comprise the 'rights and privileges, the duties and obligations, of any occupant of a social position in relation to persons occupying other positions in the social structure' (Sarbin and Allen 1968: 497). Furthermore, 'A role is a set of behaviours that belongs to an identifiable position, and these behaviours are activated when the position is occupied' (ibid. 545), whence expressions such as 'in role' and 'out of role'. Drawing on a theatrical metaphor, the authors suggest that roles belong to the part or position rather than to the players: roles such as these are 'achieved' roles, as opposed to socially 'ascribed' roles such as male, female, adult.

Achieved roles are roles taken up because of some particular set of circumstances due to specific competencies, experience, and capabilities, and have a programmed and a discretionary component (Cyert and MacCrimmon 1968). In the world of organizations, these roles are most often laid out as part of an organizational schema designed by the people with influence over the organization, whether formal or informal. In this way of thinking, the content – the 'what' – of achieved roles is prescribed in terms of their functional position within this schema, and appropriate people are sought to take up these prescribed functions. The preset role is then enacted by the incumbent.

My narrative does not particularly attempt to elucidate the ‘what’ – the list of tasks and undertakings implied in the role – of the roles of chair or general manager. Instead, as a reflective narrative, it seeks to show *how* I take up my role or roles over a specific period of time. To understand this ‘how’ a certain distinction is in order. Spender (1994) maintains that how something is done refers to the knowledge of the person accomplishing the action or task. ‘Knowing how’ something is done means having the knowledge necessary to do it, gained first through some process of learning, and afterwards applying this knowledge to a role, function or task. In a positivistic way, we know how to read, write, knit or drive, and then do so. Instead, here I am suggesting an alternative meaning for *how*. I am proposing that there are interactive, evaluative and communicative processes which constitute *how* it is that we go about that which we do. It is these processes which I am pointing to in my inquiry into practice. I believe they should figure prominently in a full account of enactment of role.

When I examine Sarbin and Allen’s (1968) theory of role enactment, only a partial account of enactment appears. Sarbin and Allen identify six variables of role enactment that were developed by grouping data taken from observations of overt conduct occurring within interactional frameworks (organizations), and then making probabilistic inferences using quantitative and qualitative research methods:

- Role expectations – actions and quality expected of the person occupying the role
  - Role location – what it is and what it is not relative to others
  - Role demands – norms and mores for specific role enactment
  - Role skills – motor and cognitive aptitude, appropriate experience, and specific training possessed, which result in effective and convincing role enactment, including “role-taking” (Mead, 1934)
  - Self-role congruence – seeking out roles whose requirements are congruent with self qualities, which develop by virtue of the roles we take on
  - Audience effects – remaining alert to others, inner or real, and their actual or anticipated reactions to one’s behaviour
- (Sarbin and Allen 1968: 000)

Sarbin and Allen's theory of role enactment holds that there should exist a predictable and lasting fit between stable, knowable individuals and fixed, defined roles, set within a determinate schema called organization. Success in achieving the fit would be assured with prior careful analysis and implementation of the six variables of the theory. For example, as regards the variable of self-role congruency, the self is portrayed as a bundle of characteristics additively acquired over time, which make up a person who will either fit the defined role or will not. In assessing the probability of such a fit, one need only be able to get to know and evaluate these characteristics.

Sarbin and Allen's insights are limited to those which can be interpreted from observations of overt conduct. While interpretation provides valuable insights, it is nonetheless a purposive, context-bound cognitive activity, which 'applies a particular perspective to what it interprets, a perspective that shapes in large part the interpretandum' (Bohman et al. 1991: 11–12). The six variables which Sarbin and Allen identify as constituting an account of role enactment are descriptors which have been established by categorizing data. These categories flow from the singular ontology of role as a defined function within an organizational schema established according to a designed structure of production. The authors detail the functional linkages between the role-holder and the organization, and refer to their findings as enactment.

However, my narrative everywhere demonstrates that much more was actually taking place than an observer could actually have been seen or interpreted and categorized in into a fixed set of variables. For example, at the beginning of the narrative, when I quit the role of board member and took up that of chair, I acted in the moment. Beyond the mechanics of chairing a meeting, I made gestures, likely in response to what I anticipated to be the expectation of the board. What I was feeling was an increased level of anxiety as I took up and held the chair, making me more self-conscious than otherwise, or at least self-conscious in a different and specific way. I became aware of myself chairing, and this occupied my consciousness for the duration of the meeting. And then there was my use of humour. The inclination to turn to humour arose in the moment. The urge to be playful was felt; it was physical, it was not solely an act of cognition or a chairing stratagem. That it got a laugh from the others would suggest engagement by them in the moment. This became the tone of the meeting as we went about our business, and

ultimately became part of the story of the meeting for all of us who were there, a story also of the meaning of my role and theirs and of the organization.

Then, as I travelled later on, I found I could not be just another 'innocent abroad'. What I had not grasped until I was in various destinations was that complete itineraries and schedules had been prepared for me, implicating significant numbers of individuals, requiring them to change their agendas and travel distances to meet with me while I was passing through. No one had requested that I be given this treatment, not even me. Each individual along the way had decided on his or her own to do so when they heard the chair of CFD Canada and trustee of the CFD federation board was visiting, even though none of them had a clear idea why I was there and only had their own idea of what those terms mean. So in each encounter I and they started at a given beginning, conditioned by what we presumed our mutual roles were. But invariably we touched upon on-going purposive activities of one sort or another, sometimes peripherally as far as I was concerned, sometimes involving me intimately. Before long, personal connection occurred but was also necessary, whether that was commiserating as I had done with John or sharing personal histories as with my counterparts of the management committee of the Youth Polytechnic. It was only through this 'process' that my and their 'role' took on any meaning to speak of to each of us.

Finally, as the trip progressed, I experienced interludes between encounters, usually involving changes in locale. During these particular interludes, however, I experienced strong bodily feelings and emotions due to the circumstances of strangeness, felt danger and fatiguing travel. I was blocked by my feelings of apprehension and could not think ahead to the next encounter with any confidence. It was difficult to plan ahead to any degree. Normally for me these interludes would form part of the ebb and flow of the passing of an active day, moments of recuperation from the intensity of one encounter or engagement and simultaneous preparation for the next; lapses from order into disorder before returning to order again in a subsequent encounter, so that every encounter feels like a new enactment, continuous with past enactment but different at the same time.

### **Coming to grips with role and organization**

Starting from the moment I took up the position of chair at the CFD Canada board meeting, the narrative can be seen as portraying processes of enactment through very local experiences of interaction with others. While I felt compelled to engage with others

and invest my energy and emotions, I believe they were in much the same position relative to me. Through this process, our roles and organizations seemed to come to be defined locally in the moment, among those of us who were interacting, by virtue of the very interaction taking place. The emotionality, physicality and complex interaction which appear throughout the narrative bespeak complex processes of personal engagement and emergence.

The more closely I look at my entire experience of enactment, and in light of my comments on Sarbin and Allen, the clarity of the constructs of role and organization dissolves, and the constructs themselves become highly contestable. The meanings of 'chair', 'CFD', 'Citadel project' and 'general manager' are no longer fixed and predictable as they may appear to be to the objective observer. There is a volatility and effervescence in them by virtue of the enactment of them, which offer an exciting opportunity for exploration.

Here I am pointing to a split between how enactment would be described theoretically, and how it is experienced in joint action. Sarbin and Allen's description uses a dualistic and spatial metaphor, in which role is enacted according to expectations set outside of the individual within the interactive framework of the organization. In this view, role could be considered a non-reducible unit (Wiley 1994; Di Tomasso 1982) situated in relation to other roles in a bounded organizational structure. The other portrays shared experiences which in the living of them ultimately define role and organization locally amongst us who are engaged with one another. Formal arrangements and structures, however present, appear more as background information.

Such a split is no small matter. It falls within a long-standing dichotomy between ways of *thinking* about and *speaking* about role and organization, and ultimately bespeaks a commensurate split in the way organizations are generally governed or managed versus the way they are experienced by their members. 'Role' and 'organization' in this sense are merely parallel constructs of the individual and the social, and the contrast here is between how the individual and the social are viewed as joined in a system or structure and how they are experienced and talked about from a processual, emergent point of view.

At first glance, these two ways of seeing the same social constructs appear to be mutually exclusive, which poses a significant difficulty for organizational thinking in general and management thinking in particular. Once acknowledged, this difficulty must be taken into account. So I now ask: what does recognizing this split mean for my attempts to build an account of role enactment and ultimately practice? Regarding each view as if it were mutually exclusive of the other makes it tempting to take one side over the other and defend that position *de rigueur* thereafter. This is what I have been doing, implicitly, in the lead up to this project, believing that I was moving towards espousing some kind of truth in the form of the processual view, and thereby eschewing the spatial view, once and for all.

In addressing this split, it does not seem adequate to simply declare that one side is right and the other wrong. Instead, the implications of the split must be explored, and each side of the split understood for its contrasts, contradictions and similarities with the other. Only once such an exploration has taken place (as we shall see in the following section) can the value of any position be known and taking a position be warranted.

### **Exploring the split between the spatial and the processual view of role and organization**

I will carry out this exploration by examining in detail three books which explore in depth the theme of group or social behaviour and local, intersubjective action. The three books examined here in particular take up the theme of the individual in society specifically to articulate the link between the local interaction of individuals and the formation of broader patterns of interaction in groups. In choosing the theme of the *individual* and the *social*, I am drawing a parallel with *role* and *organization* respectively. Drawing such a parallel is appropriate because in considering organizations to be organized groupings of interconnected roles or functions each of which is filled by individual persons (see Sarbin and Allen 1968), it follows that these individual persons are interacting according to social practices of interaction common to the functioning of groupings in society. Literature on the theme of the individual and society therefore has much to say about role and organization.

The first book I shall consider is Wiley's *The Semiotic Self* (1994), a work focused on the theory of the self, which I found significant for its clearly expressed and unequivocal faith in the validity of the spatial view of the individual and society, while attempting to

integrate processual ideas about social organization. The other two books examine different theories addressing questions of how patterns of social behaviour emanate from local interaction. One is Collins's theory of *Interaction Ritual Chains* (2003) which portrays social organization on the basis of microsociology deriving especially from Goffman's theories of interaction ritual (1967; see Project Three), as well as Garfinkel's ethnomethodology (1967). Lastly is Stacey's *Complexity and Group Processes* (2003), which delves into complex responsive processes of relating, derived from notions of the dialectical and paradoxical aspects of relating found in the work of Mead and Elias, among others.

In the following pages each work will be presented in some detail. I proceed in this way for three reasons. First, according to the methodology explicated at the beginning of this dissertation, it was in the act of detecting and recording the logic model and argumentative moves of each author that I myself assimilated an understanding of each position as well as its roots in thought. For me, it has been important to capture that understanding and submit it to examination by my readers as part of this exercise. Second, the most evident points of convergence and divergence of each author's position appear in the details of their respective works. It would be impossible of course, in so short a space to call attention to every single point of divergence; however, the reader will find enough detail to be able to fathom the true differences between these authors. Third, my reflection on the significance of these differences for my own work, which follows this presentation, is made more understandable and subject to critique by having seen these positions and what I have noticed in them.

For instance, one object of reflection for me has come from observing how these authors have taken up, each in his own way, George Herbert Mead (1863–1931), one of the preeminent twentieth-century thinkers on the individual and society. Wiley (1994) takes Mead to be a pragmatist, defining a universal autonomous self considered so essential to American-style egalitarian democracy; in so doing, he seeks to make up for the deficient faculty-psychology language of the Constitution, which he maintains was also the central purpose of Pragmatism. However, it is my view that Wiley rhetorically manoeuvres Mead's ideas into the taken-for-granted spatial view of the individual and the social. Collins (2004) suggests that Mead's philosophy of the self as co-emergent with mind and society is simply a metaphor, which Collins then uses to supplement his own position.



Stacey (2003) take up Mead for the insights he provides on how society and the individual self emerge simultaneously through paradoxical processes of interaction, eschewing the spatial metaphor favoured by Wiley.

### *The Semiotic Self*

In this work, Wiley attempts to integrate Mead's reflexive self so as to mediate the categorical spatial view of society. Wiley's conceptualization of the self imposes a very specific interpretation of the individual and society. He maintains that it is widely recognized (though not universally so) that 'reality is stacked into a system of organizational levels' (Wiley 1994: 134) patterned from the most simple to the most complex; i.e. physical-chemical (substance), biological (body), psychological (self), interactional (face-to-face), organizational (social) and cultural. Within this schema, the self is *sui generis*, autonomous unto itself in mechanical and processual interaction with other levels. This self is non-reducible into other levels of society, upwards or downwards.

Wiley's self is defined by 'inner conversation', or thought; this, in turn, has a particular structure, which he develops by synthesizing the inner conversation as depicted by Mead with that of Charles Sanders Peirce, reconciling the discrepancies between the two, using three assumptions common to each: inner conversation defines the self; the present self is the 'I'; and only the 'I' can utter, act and speak to the other or itself as an object (make gestures). He arrives at a triadic inner conversation of the 'I' with itself in three different temporal phases: past (me), present (I, inaccessible to itself), and future (you). At any given time in any given thought or experience the 'you' would be coming into the present as an emerging 'I' and the 'I' would be fading into the past as an appearing 'me', at the same time as a new 'you' is coming into view.

Wiley metaphorically calls this self a structure, shared by all humans as part of their nature.

I am using the word structure to refer to the general relationship among the present, future and past aspects of the self. These temporal phases can be called the 'I', 'you' and 'me', and they can be semiotically mapped as sign, interpretant, and object. This gives the structure of the self three parts, which I will variously

refer to as clusters, regions, roles, poles, and agencies: the past-me-object; the present-I-sign; and the future-you-interpretant.

Metaphorically I am viewing this structure as a ‘container’ within which there are ‘contents’ . . . The containment, however, is not physical or spatial but semiotic and meaningful. (p. 27)

With the structure of the self so defined, Wiley turns to inner conversation as the way the self works as semiotic process, beyond only thought, but as any and all the modes of interior meaning. Along with verbal conversation these include sensations, emotions, non-linguistic thoughts, habitual practices, and perhaps even such subtleties as body language, and tone of voice (p. 40). In so doing, Wiley synthesizes Peirce’s and Mead’s different concepts of time and participants in the inner conversation, grounding the self in thought as cognitive semiotic process. With this he can relinquish the spatial metaphor, except that part which inheres to the self as a *sui generis* level.

Having defined the form and function of the self, Wiley maintains that meaning exists for humans in the form of signs (whence the semiotic self) whose meaning arises for us by virtue of the uniquely human capability of reflexivity. He then claims that both Pierce and Mead considered reflexivity inherent in all ‘human communication or semiotic simply in the way it operated’ (p. 81). According to Wiley, for both Mead and Peirce, all thought is the self talking to itself, and all meaning is in reference to the self, even as regards simple inanimate objects.

In claiming that the self is *sui generis*, Wiley must then be able to show how it works not only within itself but also in relation to other levels of society. In doing so he moves away from cognitive understanding into notions of emotional attachment and engagement – the self being emotionally powered – to link the micro with the macro, i.e. the individual with the group. Here he turns substantively to Durkheim, in particular to his notions of solidarity.

‘Semiotic power’ is my name for the energies that underlie and empower signs. The kinds of signs that Peirce called ‘symbols’ have interpretants that are abstract general meanings. These meanings may sometimes be connected, e.g. in propositions, in ways that are true, good, or beautiful, or at least seem so. These attributes of meaning – generality, truth, goodness, and beauty – all have what I

am calling semiotic power. This notion has the same semiotic function as Lévi-Strauss's 'mana', Lacan's 'phallus', or what I will take to be Durkheim's 'solidarity'. ... The structure of the self . . . is the basic source of semiotic power. ... The reflexive structure of the self originates and generates semiotic power. (pp. 34–35)

It appears that here Wiley is lowering Durkheimian sacredness and solidarity into the *sui generis* level of the self, via the micro-sociological process of interaction, after Goffman (1967), Denzin (1989) and Collins (1981). He arrives at the conclusion that through semiotic power and reflexivity inherent in the process of inner conversation, individual self-sacredness is achieved mirroring the same phenomenon of the social level, and through this the self achieves inner organic unity and attachment to the social. With inner organic unity and attachment to the social through phenomenological substances like that of solidarity, Wiley arrives at mind, self and society, referring to Mead's thought to explain the workings of the autonomous self, while maintaining the spatial separation between the individual and the group.

### *Interaction Ritual Chains*

The argument for interaction ritual chains as a conception of how group patterns of behaviour come about from local interaction among individuals, was put forward by Collins as a paper in 1981 and fleshed out as a full-blown proposition in the 2004 book *Interaction Ritual Chains*. Collins is a micro-sociologist, who holds that local interaction is the basic unit for the organization of society. Interaction is a *sui generis* entity; not I, not you, but the space between us where all social activity takes place.

**A theory of interaction ritual** is the key to microsociology, and microsociology is the key to much that is larger. The small scale, the here-and-now of face to face interaction, is the scene of action and the site of social actors. If we are going to find the agency of social life, it will be here. Here reside the energy of movement and change, the glue of solidarity, and the conservatism of stasis. Here is where intentionality and consciousness find their places; here, too, is the site of the emotional and unconscious aspects of human interaction. In whatever idiom, here is the empirical / experiential location of our social psychology, our symbolic or

strategic interaction, our existential phenomenology, our arena of bargaining, games, exchange or rational choice. (Collins 2004: 3)

Interaction transpires through rituals of interaction (Goffman, 1967), which Collins describes as having two main axes: ‘participants develop a mutual focus of attention and become entrained in each other’s bodily micro-rhythms and emotions’ (Collins 2004: 47). He develops a ‘Mutual Focus / Emotional Entrainment Model’, which is an ‘explicit model of processes that take place in time: a fine grained flow of micro-events that build up in patterns of split seconds and ebb away in longer periods of minutes, hours and days’ (ibid. 47). He defends this position by referring to microsociological research into ultrafine details of conversation as the primary mechanism for entrainment. This research measures actual time lapses of beats and fractions of seconds in turn-taking and turn-making, including pregnant pauses, for example, and claims to demonstrate that successful conversational rhythmic entrainment in the flow of emotion and feeling is empirically observable.

Interaction rituals are constructed from a combination of ingredients which together produce ‘ritual outcomes of solidarity, symbolism, and individual emotional energy’ (p. 47). Somewhat after Goffman (1967), such ingredients include conditions precedent such as the co-presence of two or more people, boundaries for inclusion and exclusion of others, and a single focus of attention for all interactants. From these initiating conditions, a process of ritualistic interaction proceeds through feedback mechanisms, and the interaction rituals tend to intensify by virtue of the rhythmic entrainment the interactants’ effect on one another, producing a collective effervescence which characterises the interaction.

Collins maintains that rhythmic entrainment is an embodied facet of participation in ritual, and is made possible by the fact that evolution has bestowed humans with central nervous systems which can become mutually attuned. For instance, ingestion of food and drink in the company of others is an example of bodily co-participation, as are some consensual sexual activities which are indulged in, notwithstanding the apparent absence of any direct physical sexual stimulation for the persons performing them. Given that our physiology has this capacity to be mutually attuned, we naturally seek out rituals which succeed in providing us some measure of effervescence.

Collins also includes a mutual focus aspect in his model, meaning the creation of shared symbols by virtue of joint attention on a common social object. Citing Mead, he equates this process with the manipulation of symbolic representations by the participants in the interaction, until significant symbols are created, referring specifically to symbols which have the same meaning for everyone, 'symbols (e.g. personal name) which get charged up with significance through the momentary effervescence of conversations in which they play a part' (p. 85). Part of this process is the internalization of external conversation to arrive at thinking and inner role play that Mead (1934) writes about. However, Collins's view of Mead is that 'self' and its parts ('I', 'me', the 'other' and the 'generalized other'), taken together, are merely a metaphor which can be replaced by a model of shared focus of attention and the flow of energy in internalized interaction rituals in the form of inner conversation (Collins 2004: xvi). According to this view, the self is considered an autonomous entity, similar to that of Wile, within which processes take place.

From the aforementioned mutual focus comes group solidarity and membership by common devotion to the same sacred object or objects. This solidarity can be short-lived or sustained over the long term; in either case, it manifests itself by a collective effervescence which results in emotional entrainment or shared emotional experience on the part of the participants. For Collins, humans are emotional-energy-seeking: we seek the attachment of group membership because it gives us emotional energy, the need for which precipitates our urge to interact in the first place. Once membership in a group is established, it is propagated as emotional energy carried in symbols charged with emotional meaning, in particular symbols used for talk. From one interaction to another, we carry the histories of our past interactions, primarily in our emotional responses to certain types of situations or relations. Emotions are transformed in the interaction process from ingredients to outcomes as they flow across situations in micro to micro sequential linkages called interaction ritual chains, which concatenate into macro patterns.

With the preceding proposals in hand, Collins now has the beginnings of a discourse on social order and human organization, in the form of observable social stratification involving groups of autonomous individuals.

The most important of these macro-patterns of IR chains is what from a macro view point appears as stratification. Social order is produced on the micro level: that is to say, all over the map, in transient situations and local groups, which may well be stratified by class, race, gender, or otherwise divided against each other. Interaction ritual produces pockets of moral solidarity, but variably and discontinuously throughout the population. Now if we trace individual human bodies moving from one encounter to the next, we see that the history of their chains – what sociologists have conventionally referred to as their positions in the social structure – is carried along in emotions and emotion-laden cognitions that become the ingredients of the upcoming encounter. (p.105)

Because of variations in how strongly participants become attached to membership symbols (hence in intensity of emotional attachments), ‘interactions are stratified: some persons have the power to control others through rituals, while others are passive or resistant; some persons are in the centre of attention, while others are marginalized or excluded. These are the two dimensions of power and status’ (pp.111–113). This view of power and status translates into the distribution, according to one’s power and status relative to others, of chances to interact in the way one wants or needs to, in order to obtain the emotional energy one seeks. In other words, according to Collins, social stratification can be seen as stratification in the distribution of emotional energy.

To generalize the emotional energy distribution idea across society, Collins invokes the analogy of emotional energy markets, on the premise that emotional energy seeking is analogous to the seeking of material goods or economic benefit. As in all markets, there is a function of luck as to how one’s chances will stack up to those of others. Collins takes the market analogy to the extreme, using notions of funds of emotional energy to be invested by individuals, return on investment of emotional energy, emotional energy loading, and people with more emotional energy than others enjoying more power or status.

Collins pursues the market idea for insights into mechanisms of patterning. His account of the individual and the social shows the social to be an accretion of micro events enacted by individuals into structures of distribution of emotional energy flowing into and out of individuals. Collins’s account suggests that organization is a ‘pocket of solidarity’ (p. 105) amongst individuals, the form of which manifests the distribution of

this energy as patterns of power and status. The distribution of this energy is a matter of good luck and endeavour on the part of individuals, as emotional energy flows to them in interaction rituals by virtue of emotional entrainment and mutual focus. The individuals Collins talks about are the product of their personal history of interaction ritual chains. While he admits that individuals are unique, this is not the 'result of enduring individual essences. . . . Individuals are unique just to the extent that their pathways through interactional chains, their mix of situations across time, differ from other persons' pathways. . . . In a strong sense the individual is the interaction ritual chain. The individual is but the precipitate of past interactional situations and an ingredient of each new situation' (pp. 4–5).

Microsociology in general, and interaction ritual chains thinking in particular, endeavours to explain the emergent aspects of experience otherwise unaccounted for in spatial or systemic thinking. However, Collins effectively denies this possibility: 'With more analytical refinement, the sociologist can examine the ingredients for making rituals that individuals have accumulated, and thereby predict what their combination of ingredients will bring about' (p.142). This is tantamount to saying that all outcomes of human interaction are predictable and therefore programmable, if only one has access to enough data and the necessary theories to interpret it. Such predictability of human conduct is precisely one of the central premises of systems thinking (Midgely 2000; Jackson 2000). It is teleological and is antithetical to the idea of emergence.

I make this particular point here because, whatever else Collins's work may have to offer for my inquiry, his apparent inability to break free from a preoccupation with positivistic predictability and programmability in human activity is in stark contrast to the idea of complex responsive processes of human relating discussed in the following section, as is Wiley's preoccupation with levels and functional linkages.

### *Complexity and Group Processes*

Ralph Stacey, Douglas Griffin and Patricia Shaw (Stacey et al. 2000) have put forward a way of thinking about individuals, groups, organizations and society, termed 'complex responsive processes of relating', which draws on non-spatial, processual ideas of the individual and society. Where micro-sociological thought as portrayed by Collins (2003) follows a deductive approach to explain sociologically observable phenomena, complex

responsive process thinking is inductive, producing an understanding of the individual and the group by reflecting on the complex nature of local interaction and its role in the simultaneous and dialectical formation of the individual and the group as different facts of the same processes of relating.

Complex responsive processes of relating is intended to account for the broad number and variety of moves, surprises, emotions, time conceptions, inner and interpersonal conversations, and the innovation and novelty inherent in interpersonal interaction at whatever scale. The central premise is that systems-type approaches and spatial metaphors cannot explain all of these characteristics of human interaction satisfactorily. Instead, by using as analogies the ideas of emergence and self-organization found in the complexity sciences, Stacey et al. (2000) reorient thought in favour of processes of emergence, embracing the paradox where the individual and the social are both aspects of one process of forming and being formed at the same time. Stacey and his co-authors trace human systems thinking and thought on the dialectical formation of the individual and the group to their philosophical roots as Kantian systems or Hegelian dialectic, respectively, and show that they are two ontologically equal but mutually incompatible ways of conceiving of human being. The first espouses a dualistic spatial view of the person with the mind inside and the social outside with processes and structural devices connecting the two, while the other adheres to the simultaneous and dialectical emergent formation of the two through complex processes of interaction. Here Stacey and his colleagues have definitely shown the fork in the ontological path, challenging thought to either choose one side of the fork or the other, or at least acknowledge which fork one is on, because depending on which it is, conceptions of the self, interaction processes, organization, role, practice and ethics are radically different.

In *Complexity and Group Processes* (2003) Stacey develops these positions further, which is of particular interest at this point of my inquiry. His stated purpose is the application of these ideas to group analysis, but at the same time he admits to the possibility of application to other domains such as management.

Stacey presents Mead's self as co-present with the social, and also turns to Elias in favour of his thought of the group as a figuration. Here Stacey combines two theories, Mead and Elias, not one to complete the other, but together to open new areas of inquiry.



What Mead presents in his theory of symbolic interactionism is complex, nonlinear, iterative processes of communicative interaction between people in which mind, self and society all emerge simultaneously in the living present. Elias's theory of process sociology presents processes of power relating in which social structures (habits, routines, and beliefs) emerge at the same time as personality structures ways of experiencing ourselves. Both Mead and Elias are concerned with local interaction in the present in which widespread, global patterns emerge as social and personality structures, as identity and difference, as human 'habitus'. (Stacey 2003: 66).

While avoiding biological determinism, Stacey engages a discourse of the body as the embodiment of the self in thought, such that humans are physiologically social. According to Stacey, when I feel, my body does the feeling; when I think, I can only be conscious of my thought by virtue of the conversation I am having with myself, which is made possible by the functioning of my physiology. I could very well have such conversation with myself out loud, but the civilizing process over the centuries (Elias 2000) has had the effect of keeping inner conversational gestures silent in the form of thought, creating the impression in modern times that there is an internal world, confusing a privately held, silent self-conversational process with the existence of an interior space. However, the conversation I have with myself is no less physical than a vocal one I may have with others. Both require physical capabilities – central nervous systems, bodily capabilities for some type of speech and hearing – making thought as embodied as any physical, visible gesture (see also Burkitt 1999). These attributes are common to the entire human species; it is in the social exercise of them that one person becomes differentiated from others.

This particular treatment of the social evolution of the person is what I would call Stacey's 'Eliasian' turn, whereby society is emergent and unplanned, emanating from the very process of how individual people get on with themselves and with one another. Elias suggested that the social took the form of self-regulating and self-organizing 'figurations' (Elias 1978) of interdependent people, interacting according to the organizing influences of those very interdependencies expressed as power relations. Speaking of how order can arise in society when no one instance can plan it or impose it, he writes:

It is simple enough: plans and actions, the emotional and the rational impulses of individual people, constantly interweave in a friendly or hostile way. *This basic tissue resulting from many single plans and actions of men can give rise to changes and patterns that no individual person has planned or created. From this interdependence of people arise an order sui generis, an order more compelling and stronger than the will and reason of individual people composing it.* It is the order of interweaving human impulses and strivings, the social order, which determines the course of historical change. (Elias 2000: 366; see also Stacey 2003: 40).

This *sui generis* order to which Elias refers is not the *sui generis* level of Wiley (1994). It is rather an all-encompassing order in which the actions of the individual and the group emerge together into a state of order or disorder which could never have been planned or laid out in advance by some central authority. This order cannot be reduced to that of the individual or the group. It is a property of both taken together. It is the identity of the individual and the group. Here we find Elias the sociologist, intuiting that within a philosophy of human free will acting within a web of interdependency (figurations), any order that is observable must be self-organizing and self-regulating to be sustainable. Clearly, the larger the group becomes, the more the complexities of these self organizing processes increase.

Such a theory of self-emergent order requires some satisfactory explanation of what Collins (2003) would call micro processes of the formation of the self and the patterning of human interaction across groups. Elias came at these issues through theories of the emotions, power relating and the use of symbol in communication to bond the 'I' and the 'we' as engaging of the self and the other. In addition to espousing Elias's explanation, Stacey turns to Mead and the simultaneous emergence of the self and society.

Human society is emerging simultaneously with human minds, including selves. Mead consistently argued that one is not more important than the other; that one could not exist without the other. The social, in human terms, is a highly sophisticated process of cooperative interaction between people in the medium of symbols in order to undertake joint action. Such sophisticated interaction could not exist without self conscious minds but neither could those self conscious minds exist without that sophisticated form of cooperation. (Stacey 2003: 63)

By identifying the fundamental importance of communicative interaction through the medium of symbols to explain local, short term processes, Stacey, like Elias, establishes a continuum of interaction from the inner conversation of individual selves to the dynamics of group figuration, as one complex order.

Again referring to Mead, Stacey points to the social act as the gesture that calls forth a response from another, and gesture and response together constitute the meaning of the social act for both. Gesture and response cannot be separated. Meaning lies in the entire singular social act, in the social object or relation created by the gesture-response interaction. It is continually transforming as interaction transpires over time with response as new gesture acting back on the earlier gesture creating new meaning in the moment. At every turn we can know the meaning of the social act because we are conscious of our own presence within it and we experience the embodied reactions (for example, feelings of happiness, sadness, and fear) it provokes. This resulting and emergent meaning taken part in together and simultaneously by the participants, makes the gesture-response couplet a significant symbol in Mead's terms.

In interaction, our responses are not just reactions in the form of feelings – instinctive or automatic reactive gestures ritualized with reference to sacred objects. They are new gestures taken on the basis of what we have come to sense as the meaning of the social act taking place. We think before gesturing anew; our thought process takes the form of a silent conversation with ourselves, in which we envision a new social act. In a silent role play, we take the place or attitude of the other toward our self. As we silently enact the anticipated gesture, it calls forth in us the same response it will likely call forth in the other, making us able to anticipate the consequences of our gestures (actions) and to sense the meaning of the emerging social act even before gesturing. These thoughts are not then stored as a representation, they are spontaneously re-enacted at every turn and lead to new action or inaction. Each iteration is a new meaningful experience, identity recreated in a new feeling state. Repetitive patterns can occur, but with the possibility of change and surprise at every occasion.

I would describe this process of gesture-response in the following way. As I think, I play a role and conduct an inner conversation in the context of what is transpiring around me. As this occurs, I am already experiencing feelings as the object of others' gestures toward me. In that feeling state, an intention to act arises in my thought, in the form of an

envisioned responding gesture. In moving to act, I see and hear in thought me making the responding gesture toward the other. At this point I become a 'me', an object of my own thought, and I experience a reaction as an 'other' or the 'generalized other' would likely do. In other words, my gesture calls forth in me the same response – disgust, laughter, excitement – as it would in the other. In light of this response, I can foresee the other's likely gesture toward me because I can take the attitude of the other. Then I chose to act (make a gesture) knowingly or spontaneously. However, I cannot really know how I will act until I actually do so, at which point I will see myself as 'me' having acted. In the spur of the moment, it may happen that I act contrary to all of my prior thought, surprising even myself. Also, it may be that my understanding of the other or the meaning of the social act was faulty, in which case my gesture may be completely unexpected or incomprehensible, setting off a whole new direction in interaction and creating novel meaning of the social act.

What I have described above is the 'I' – the one who acts – being called forth in the process of interacting with the other. The 'I' is being enacted as the next step in the emergence of a future mutually constructed with my interlocutors. Such enactments are lived evaluative experiences, and through them we learn how to anticipate the consequences of our gestures in familiar or recurrent situations. As we continue to socialize, we 'develop the capacity to take the attitude of the whole group [Mead's generalized other] . . . not just toward one's gestures but also toward one's self. What has evolved here is the capacity to be an object to oneself, a "me". A self, as the relationship between "me", "I" and the other, has therefore emerged, as well as an awareness of that self, that is, self-consciousness' (Stacey 2003: 63; parenthesis added). Contrary to Wiley (1994), the self would not be a level or a structure, semiotic, reflexive or otherwise, but is a state of consciousness or thought emergent in the reflexive dialectic of 'I' and 'me' occurring within processes of social interaction.

In discussing the physiological basis of complex responsive processes of relating, Stacey refers to the vicissitudes of separation from and attachment to the other or others, as a result of our particular physical-chemical make-up. He demonstrates that all of these processes refer to our physiology in one way or another, though physiology alone cannot explain them; rather emotions and senses are stimulated through action into the world, both as inner role play and as public gesture, and such action is stimulated by a biological

need for interaction to regulate our body's chemistry and our anxiety responses to chemical imbalances.

The patterning of significant symbols occurs primarily through conversational exchanges, gestures and responses in the form of utterances, body movements and facial expressions. The vocal form of gesture is the most powerful because of our capacity as humans to hear our own voices, which calls forth in ourselves the same response as it does in others, as we silently role play and then vocalize. Vocal gestures take place in sequences of turn-taking and turn-making, as pairs of question-answer, request-response, invitation-acceptance or provocation-counter-provocation, which urge the conversation forward, with a felt quality of liveliness due to emotional engagement. The sequencing process is oriented by variances interjected as they arise in the thought of one or the other, creating conditions for novelty and consistency at the same time. A narrative of the interaction emerges with story lines and propositions, constructing the relationship or relationships at the same time as the relationships construct the storylines. The complexity of such interactions increases as patterns emerge from the local to the global and as specific ways of speaking and thinking take hold in the wider group in the form of shared values or ideologies. These ways of speaking and thinking become patterns of behaviours, making sophisticated cooperation possible among two or more persons, collaborating, negotiating or competing.

Many themes of Stacey's position on complex cooperative action in human organization can also be found in Habermas (1984), despite his sometimes divergent conceptions of the self and society. Habermas (1984) distinguishes cooperative action as a move away from simple, cause-and-effect, means-end action, where the outcome is generally predictable since it is enfolded within the very nature of the action itself. Such action is teleological, strategic action. As such, it is lowest on the scale of social complexity. Moving up the scale through what is described as normatively regulated action and dramaturgical action, Habermas arrives at the most complex of human action, which he terms 'communicative action', wherein human actors cooperate to achieve tacitly or explicitly agreed-upon outcomes (1984: 94). Stacey refers to such collaboration as 'sophisticated cooperation' (2003: 63). This is the action which characterizes the human organizations that managers are called upon to manage.

Habermas draws on a broad lineage of systems and constructionist social thought including Weber, Mead, Durkheim and Parsons. He develops the idea of communicative action to explain how people get along in situations of sophisticated cooperation. Communicative action requires shared definitions of a social situation, ‘contexts . . . ordered in such a way that agreement will be reached about what the participants may treat as a fact, or as a valid norm, or as a subjective experience’ (ibid. 70). Reaching agreement among the participants is itself a cooperative process, achieved through taking the other’s situation definition into one’s own using language made up of utterances as speech acts oriented to reaching agreement. ‘Every action oriented to reaching understanding can be conceived as part of a cooperative process of interpretation aiming at situation definitions that are subjectively recognized’ (ibid).

Stacey’s process-based account, building on Mead and Elias, sheds considerable new light on the subject of sophisticated cooperation, including the nature of role enactment and practice in organizations. Stacey and Habermas, together provide important insights into how experiences of sophisticated cooperation function. They all point to aspects of experience that we take for granted as the shared situation when we engage in such cooperation, which I find to be analogous to the values, ideologies, practices strictures and boundaries we take for granted in organizations. They all also point to processes of interaction as the way we engage in cooperative action, and all three point to cooperative interaction as emergent and unpredictable. Taken together, these ideas make a compelling case for the centrality of social interaction in understanding practical engagement in organized settings.

### **Reflection on role enactment in organizations as practice**

In the preceding section, I took up the examination of three different inquiries into the same question of how individuals and groups relate to one another, to explore by way of analogy the concepts of role and organization. In my view each of these inquiries may be considered an exemplar. Each is a thoroughly developed but significantly different attempt by a recognized thought leader to explain the functioning of the individual and the social. The scholarliness, breadth and scope of each endeavour demonstrate the intensity of the ongoing struggles towards understanding the individual and the social, and the functioning of human cooperation.

Laying out the thought within each of each these works in this project as I have done

exposes the thinking of each to the reader, and has allowed me not only to observe the struggle I have just mentioned, but also to perceive the significant differences between them and ultimately to identify further issues relevant to my purpose of developing an alternative account of individual practice in organizations.

Wiley (1994) maintains an unshakable confidence in the self as a non-reducible entity, above, below and within which mechanisms act to connect with other selves to form groups, such as organizations, and society. Seeking to renew American pragmatism as pre-eminent in sociological thinking (Joas, 1997; Wiley, 1994), the author rhetorically manoeuvres Mead's and Peirce's thought on reflexivity and emergence into spatial thinking.

Collins (2004) proclaims that it is the interaction between individuals which is the non-reducible kernel of society, and builds up a model of groups and society on the basis of interaction rituals. Of course, these interactions require that individual persons partake in them. These individuals have a physiological make-up which seeks emotional energy, pushing them into interaction with others, so that their psycho-social formation is the result of the accretion of interactive experiences over long periods of time. Chains of these interaction rituals across diverse groupings in the population produce patterns of social behaviour, including social stratification. This view is quite mechanistic, and despite the author's attempts to ground human relating in flows of emotional energy, his view perpetuates the duality of the individual and the group as spatially differentiated with insides and outsides.

Stacey et al. (2000) and Stacey (2003) eschew any such formulations altogether, and instead espouse Elias's notion of one *sui generis* social order made up of individuals and groups which are different facets of the same processes of the formation of mind, self and society. These processes, which they call complex responsive processes of relating, are grounded in the human physiological capacity to perceive the meaning of gesture-response interaction in the form of significant symbols, which are experienced in the body not only as thought but also as different intensities of emotional excitement. Here, the significant symbol is created jointly by the interactants in a group, contrary to Wiley (1994), where the semiotic content is held within the unitary self, or shared within the group with reference to some external sacred object, or Collins where the individuals forming the group achieve emotional effervescence. Complex responsive processes of

relating make communicative interaction possible, which in turn enables sophisticated cooperation typical of organized human activity (Stacey 2003). Because every social act is a new enactment of the dialectic formation of mind, self, and society through complex responsive processes of relating, patterns of behaviour and shared values emerge over time and across populations as a result of on-going communicative interaction in the everyday life of society, always with the possibility of change or consistency at the same time.

The exploration of these three exemplars allows me to see the narrative of role enactment presented at the beginning of this Project in a different, more specific light. For example, in the account of the scene of the meeting at the youth polytechnic in the office with Mr K and his colleagues, an observer may well perceive the powerful donor from the rich north sitting in the rudimentary office, meeting with the meek southern recipient. This may in fact have been the starting point of our interaction together, as evidenced by Mr K and company's sensed obligation to make formal presentations to me. Then, as free-flowing interaction proceeds, we discover something about each other. Our gestures and responses meld into one interactive experience, with a sense of authenticity and shared knowing, which then becomes the meaning not only of our interaction but also of our respective roles. This meaning emerges through the communicative interaction taking place, and will be recreated in some form, much the same or quite differently, in every subsequent moment of interaction. It can only be interpreted from outside of the interaction itself. I could recount much the same portrayal of my move into role of CFD Canada chair that afternoon in Ottawa in June, and a narrative of my current activities as general manager of Citadel would reveal much the same thing.

All three of the works examined in the previous section could provide some measure of explanation as to what was transpiring in these encounters. For instance, the various encounters related in the narrative began against a presumption of some social organizational form containing roles and anticipated ways of relating, easily envisioned as those to be found in Wiley (1994) or Collins (2004). In fact, Frances Westley does just that with Collins (1981) in her application of his idea of interaction ritual chains to strategy-making in organizations (1990).

Wiley and Collins would be considered a structural-spatial way of seeing the interaction and social organization. One cannot discount the influence this view must exert as a



starting point on the nature of the enactment to follow, if only to acknowledge that it provides clues as to expectations of the interactants in terms of power relations and performance which will affect behaviours. At the same time, the reflexive aspect of the accounts reveals that as the interactions evolved, roles changed, multiplied and took on local meaning in the enacting of them notwithstanding starting assumptions, and this began to reflect back on expectations, as the processual view of Stacey (2003) would suggest.

Habermas (1984) obliquely deals with this same issue by arranging different parts of interaction spatially. His philosophical undertaking is to combine the internalist perspective of the participant and the externalist perspective of the observer, in order to rehabilitate rationalism by bringing into a renewed philosophy of rationalism the very critique of it, emanating primarily from social constructionism. In so doing, he describes 'lifeworld', which incorporates the presupposed background knowledge and self-evident unquestioned presuppositions forming the ground necessary to reach agreement among several subjects communicatively coordinating their action: 'I can introduce here the concept of the *Lebenswelt* or lifeworld, to begin with as the correlate of processes of reaching understanding. Subjects acting communicatively always come to an understanding in the horizon of a lifeworld. Their lifeworld is formed from more or less diffuse, always unproblematic, background convictions. This lifeworld background serves as a source of situation definitions that are presupposed by participants as unproblematic' (1984: 70).

Paradigmatically, however, the structural-spatial and processual views of organizational life and roles are mutually exclusive: one can be prescribed and manipulated according to rules or power, the other is emergent through processes of interaction. Prior to embarking on the exploration contained in this project, I believed that I would have to declare a winner in the struggle between them, choosing one as the true way to explain individual and social life, and was expecting to do so in developing the alternative account of practice I am attempting here. Now, while I do find Stacey and colleagues' proposals compelling because they add important new understandings of human interaction and social organization, I must also acknowledge that the spatial-structural account as I now understand it has and will continue to have enormous currency in social and organizational thought. This is the dominant discourse which usually conditions all

settings of cooperative action. I feel, therefore, that it is essential that both accounts be taken seriously in considering role, organization and practice.

As a consequence, I now can see role enactment problematized in a particular way. The practitioner is in a dichotomous situation, where he or she is continually reconciling within him or herself the struggle between the processual and structural-spatial ways of approaching organizational life. When I think of my practice as engaging in and often being called upon to manage sophisticated cooperation, I can see that the roles I enact are generally conceived of by me and others abstractly from the way that such cooperation actually takes place. Enacting these roles as part of my practice therefore entails living in this ambiguity and somehow muddling through. Or so it would seem to be muddling through. Reflection on my experiences reveals practice looked at in this light to be much more complex than that. Instead, at every turn I am conscious that I am acting within the strictures of a formal organizational set up, which hypothetically define my role, but I do not stop at the strictures, because at the limit I know they prescribe the ‘what’ of role, but are generally silent as to the ‘how’, which is the communicative action of sophisticated cooperation necessary if we wish to achieve our cooperative purpose.

To accept this dichotomy is not to evade the difficulty of deciding in favour of one position or another. The more compelling way to consider this new position is now to identify holding these two contradictory positions as a paradox central to practice in organizations, to understand its significance and to incorporate it in the alternative account of practice that is the object of my research. In so doing, we may open up rich territory for exploration and inquiry, based on both points of view, in order to see new horizons more clearly.

### **Concluding remarks**

In Project Three I explored the engagement in joint action, and the liveliness that characterizes such engagement, as significant aspects of practice in organizations. At the beginning of Project Four, I asserted that joint action always entails the enactment of roles within a situation of cooperation among persons. This assertion, if left unexplained, might lead the reader to suppose that division of labour is the basis of cooperative action after all, contrary to the central premise of my research. To prevent such a mistaken supposition I undertook a close examination of role theory, beginning with a detailed narrative of how I took up roles in CFD Canada and the Citadel project over a month-long

period. Through the examination of role theory, in particular with reference to Sarbin and Allen (1968), I pinpointed a lacuna in the way the theory accounts for role enactment, and this in turn necessitated a closer examination of concepts lying at the root of thinking on role enactment, namely role and organization.

These concepts were examined through reflection on three positions:Wiley (1994;); Collins ( 2004); and Stacey et al.( 2000) and Stacey ( 2003), chosen as exemplars of ways of thinking of the individual and the social, which I argue to be parallel constructs to the role and the organization, respectively. Reflecting on these positions in reference to the narrative has led me to conclude that there is a paradox inherent in the enactment of roles in organizations. As we engage in the interaction inherent in all cooperative action through complex processes of relating, as Stacey et al. (2000) claim to be the case, we are nonetheless confronted with roles and organizational structures conceived of and often managed according to the structural-spatial dualistic view of the individual and the social, which must also be taken into account.

In the synopsis to follow, I will explore the significance of this paradox and how it may be taken up in practice. This will complete the elaboration of the alternative account of practice which is the object of my thesis,



## SYNOPSIS

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This dissertation has sought to develop an alternative account of practice in organizations. I was moved to do so because in my active life it has been my experience that my practice in organizations is not recognized as such in terms of the dominant discourse – the way ‘practice’ is normally spoken and written about. Here I am referring to discourse on practice typically turning upon occupations, professions and jobs as manifestations of publicly recognized roles or functions within organized activity, established as a function of prescribed divisions of labour and the application of skills and techniques. The dominant discourse assumes that people interact in the ways that their assigned roles and functions are planned to work as interrelated parts of a shared task. While there are also processual accounts of the relationship between work, occupation, career, identity and practice, the predominant assumption still is that such processes will align with a preset differentiation of roles or division of labour.

Reflecting on this gap in recognition, within the context of doctoral studies on organizational change, produced the insight which launched this research; namely that exploring my practice reflexively could produce thought and ideas which could contribute to the elaboration of fuller account, changing the dominant discourse on practice and thereby making a contribution to knowledge about organizations.

Each of the four projects through which I pursued this insight has added to an overall account of practice: not in a linear, sequential or patterned way as in one unitary arc of argumentation planned ahead of time, but rather as an object to be taken on its own terms, informed by themes from preceding projects while taking up new themes as they arose in the context of the project at hand. The production of this dissertation has therefore been a journey of research and inquiry, and this dissertation itself reflects that journey.

At this stage it is fitting to summarize and explicate my overall proposal. First, I present a brief summary of the arguments and determinations I have made to date, which constitute the nature and substance of the left-hand side of the title of this dissertation: practice as role enactment. Then, in order to bring my arguments and proposal into sharper focus, I develop the right-hand side of the title: managing sophisticated purposive cooperation. I then summarize what I believe to be my original and distinctive contribution to

knowledge, present a brief review of the effectiveness of my methodology, and end this dissertation with a concluding reflection.

### **Practice as role enactment**

I have argued that practice in organizations is a communicative process that is intimately linked to role enactment. My argument is based on three central findings arrived at over the course of my research.

First, the general notion of practice, whether social, cultural or professional, can be expanded to comprise the processes of emergence which are central to the joint formation of social groupings and individuals, and cooperative action. Contrary to the dominant view of practice as described above, practice may be regarded as encompassing dialectical processes of thought, social interaction and joint action (Shotter 1993) which are constantly emerging and transforming through experience. Conceiving of practice as occurring through processes of communicative interaction with others, my inquiry opens into those processes as they appear in themes detected in the narratives about my experience.

The second central finding in this research came about through an examination of the theme of emotionality in one such group experience of practice. Emotionality was shown to be essential to engagement in group processes, and therefore central to practice. Moreover, it is the emotionality of engagement which ensures liveliness in a group, making it possible to engage with one another towards chosen goals. Emotionality is an embodied process, and examining physicality in interaction also provided insights into the dynamics of interaction one might expect to characterize practical cooperation. The claim that emotionality is essential for practice and for effective group processes is in stark contrast to the dominant business and management discourse, which eschews emotion in favour of a privileged claim to rationality and objectivity. The clear relevance of emotionality and the dynamics of engagement to an alternative account of practice also confirms that practice falls in the area of communicative interaction.

Writing detailed narratives about the new roles I was moving into in my life at the time raised the theme of roles in general and role enactment in particular. This theme was pursued in project four, in which I critically explored role enactment as it is conventionally understood in role theory. As a result, I reframed enactment as a process

of emergence in which the role and the organization emerge simultaneously through dynamic dialectic processes analogous to the theory of the formation of mind, self and society postulated by Mead (1934) and developed further by Elias (2001), Stacey et al. (2000) and Stacey (2003). Thus the nature of the link between practice and role enactment becomes the third major finding of my research.

If, as this finding suggests, practice is definable as engagement in processes of enactment of roles in co-emergent organizations, a further question then arises: should the contrary conventional view of practice, role and organization be rejected entirely in favour of this alternative account? Although we might well promote the process point of view over the conventional, objectivist stance, it seems certain that the conventional view of the enactment of role and organization will continue to play a part in the practical world, if only as a dominant discourse.

Accepting that these preconceptions will persist points to a significant attribute of individual practice in organizations. We must acknowledge that there is a paradox inherent in the enactment of roles in organizations. As we engage in the interaction inherent in all cooperative action through complex processes of relating, as Stacey et al. (2000) claim to be the case, we are nonetheless confronted with roles and organizational structures conceived of and often managed according to the structural-spatial dualistic view of the individual and the social, which must also be taken into account at the same time. Habermas (1984) attempts to resolve this paradox by proposing a dualistic approach of communicative action against a background of shared realities called lifeworld, which may well incorporate the dominant discourse. I believe instead that this paradox further problematizes practice as role enactment and must be acknowledged in that light, as I will discuss below.

### **Managing purposive sophisticated cooperation**

The next step in this synopsis is to elucidate the meaning of practice as role enactment as presented in this dissertation. I will do so in the following pages through the use of a concrete example to be found in the literature, that of managing, whence the right hand side of the title of this dissertation.

In his work as a teacher and prolific writer on management, Henry Mintzberg has long sought to correct what he considers to be serious deficiencies in the conventional view of

management practice. He has made a significant contribution to management thought through his research, writing, and initiating management educational programs. I consider Mintzberg to be an important and influential voice on management practice, and so I refer to his proposals here for the comprehensive portrayal they offer of management as a practice, allowing me to see even farther than I otherwise could have done, even though I am critical of his epistemology. Looking closely at this portrayal in relation to my own proposals will also allow me to comment on the nature of my own contribution.

In 1973, Mintzberg developed a contingency theory of managerial work, founded on observed practices of managers, on the principle that '[e]very manager stands in the same basic relationship to his organizational unit and its environment' (Mintzberg 1973: 110), as if they were following patterns and structures inherent in human organization. By 1994, Mintzberg had developed a model of management as a way of tying all of the various parts of the job of managing together into a conceptual whole. This model holds the person to be at the centre of a frame, with his or her values, experience, knowledge, competencies and mental models for seeing the world. The model is described as 'the person in the job with a frame manifested by an agenda[,] embedded in ... the milieu in which the work is practiced' (Mintzberg 1994: 15). The context has an inside, an outside and a within space, and management occurs on three levels – information, people and action.

On the basis of his earlier thinking, Mintzberg (2004) specifically pursues the practice of management, which he believes is 'going off the rails with dysfunctional consequences for society' (Mintzberg 2004: x). Here Mintzberg's central idea is that synthesis is the essence of management: managing is not just an art (for example, as attributed to the manager as hero), in a culture of exploration as entrepreneurship and vision, nor just a science, with its culture of exploitation. It is actually all about craft, the balancing of art and science. As craft, it can only be learned in the doing of it, and so Mintzberg insists that it can only be appropriated as a practice from the bottom up, on the job, and not stepped into at the top on the sole strength of cognitive knowledge as proponents of the MBA would have it.

Mintzberg completes his portrayal of the practice of managing by attributing a key function to reflecting on experience as the way to achieve the synthesis he considers so central. People may learn little from their experience unless they can classify and analyze



information, observations and insights gained through experience. ‘We don’t carry around reality in our heads; we carry around theories and models, whether we realize it or not’ (ibid. 249). These models must be accessed, and continually developed into better ones, specifically by reflecting on experience, making sense (Weick 1995), getting the meaning; that is to say, understanding the moral or emotional significance of what one is doing, not only the outcomes or impacts.

For Mintzberg, reflecting on experience is intended to uncover assumptions, reframe them on the basis of theory and practice and allow testing of new hypotheses leading to further, more enlightened action. It is an inductive and exploratory cognitive process which follows a cyclical pattern of action-reflecting-learning-new action, reminiscent of Schön (1991).

Reflecting does not mean musing, and it is not casual. It means wondering, probing, analyzing, synthesizing, connecting – ‘to ponder carefully and persistently [the] meaning [of an experience] to the self.’ And not just *what* you think happened but ‘*why* do you think it happened?’ and ‘*how* is this situation similar and different from other problems?’ . . . All of this requires struggling. As noted earlier, implicit theories or models have to be surfaced and disbeliefs suspended so they can be put under scrutiny – not an easy thing to do. (Mintzberg, 2004: 254)

Mintzberg’s ultimate focus on the soft skills of management such as reflection is certainly an important step forward. But his model of the manager’s head embedded at the centre of a surrounding frame, however reflective, takes the social world as

. . . a spectacle presented to an observer who takes up a ‘point of view’ on the action, who stands back so as to observe it and, transferring into the object the principles of his relation to the object, conceives of it as a totality intended for cognition alone. . . . This point of view is the one afforded by high positions in the social structure, from which the social world appears as a representation and practices are no more than ‘executions’, stage parts, performances of scores, or the implementing of plans. (Bourdieu 1977: 96)

In the end, we are still left with only a partial picture of practice, as a functionalist application of skills, in this case the skill of reflecting on experience.

## Acknowledging paradox

Ultimately, Mintzberg stops at an objectivist idea of practice of management. He reduces reflection to another form of knowledge (Spender 1994: 392). In ‘experienced reflection’ (Mintzberg 2004: 264), experience is considered in the light of conceptual ideas building to a linear chain of knowledge, oscillating from tacit to explicit and back to tacit in endless cycles. Concepts-plus-experience lead to reflections, which in turn lead to insights and learning which have impacts on the job, which are then reflected on, to be better equipped to undertake subsequent experience. Mintzberg’s account lacks understanding from within joint action (Shotter 1993), and thereby cannot see the unresolved paradox of the practitioner. There is little to account for how the managerial role is to be found in the often imperceptible ‘network of beaten tracks and paths made ever more practicable by constant use’, as opposed techniques of management occupying ‘the geometrical space of a map, an imaginary representation of all theoretically possible roads and routes’ (Bourdieu 1977: 37–38). I do believe however that Mintzberg’s focus on reflection is an attempt in that direction, but to suffice it would have to take a reflexive turn, which I shall discuss below.

In Charlebois (2003), I describe my travails of trying to achieve cross-boundary collaboration within a diverse, multifunctional bureaucratic unit of the administration of the newly-merged City. As a manager inexperienced in large bureaucracies, I naively believed I could get to this result by instating a culture of collaboration, banking on notions of self-organization to be achieved through promoting free-flowing conversation amongst my employees. In retrospect, I see that I was attempting what I suspect most managers attempt (and which Mintzberg does not disavow): to control, direct and mandate self-organization; in other words, to *mandate* the communicative practices of sophisticated cooperation, from the position of observer. While I was trying to do this, little did I consider that my own role as manager was being enacted, however normative the public sector organizational environment was.

This example shows that the manager is caught in a significant dichotomy related to taking up the role of manager. On the one hand, he or she is expected to direct, to a purposive goal, cooperative group action, as we can see in Mintzberg’s formulation of the manager’s job. But, as I have shown, group cooperation occurs through self-managed communicative processes intrinsic to sophisticated cooperation and the enactment of

roles. At the same time, the manager's enactment of his or her own role is co-emergent with the organization he or she is attempting to manage. The enactment of the role of manager is therefore characterized by many contradictions and complexities, which can also be looked upon as paradox. Within this paradox, the structural-spatial stance on organizational life and the processual nature of enactment as presented earlier co-exist in time and in experience in all the various areas of endeavour. In this way of thinking, one would be paradoxically acting into situations by virtue of complex processes of relating, while at the same time taking into account that the situations one is acting into have been cast and managed as if the levels, units and systemic functioning of the spatial metaphor were actually the case.

Vaill (1989), like Bourdieu (1977), has pointed out that the objectivism of management thought, as represented by Mintzberg for example, confounds the undertaking of fully understanding management practice as practice, holding it instead to be the domain of masterminds who cognitively design and implement organizational plans and strategies.

[T]wo key functions run through all degree programs in management and all management development programs: the task is to understand the system better and get it to do what you want it to (that is, control it) more effectively and efficiently . . . All the content we have been teaching and all the experiences we have been fostering come back to these two objectives: comprehension and control. (Vaill 1989: 77)

Where Mintzberg fails to deal with the split between how organizations are objectively thought of and managed on the one hand, and what it actually means to manage within experience on the other, Vaill considers it to be a paradox:

The . . . chronic and intense paradox that may transcend a system model is the action taker's own presence in the model. The leader or manager is always part of the system being acted upon; this individual is certainly no more fixed an element than any other and, indeed, may be more variable *just because* of possessing action responsibility. Just how the consciousness of this person is going to 'dance' with events in the system cannot be known. It cannot be known by an external observer in any very complete way, and it certainly cannot be known by the person him- or herself. This means that 'understanding of the system'

(comprehension) at any moment and ‘action in the system’ (control) at any moment cannot be known. (Ibid. 79)

Vaill’s characterization of the manager acting within the system and managing outside of it at the same time, which I had also articulated in slightly different terms in Project Four, is of some use here. While Vaill is referring to management, he is pointing to the idea that the paradox is innate in the very fact of the working person participating in a social grouping reified as an organization with its organization charts, authority structures, prescribed processes, regulations and enabling legislation, and where the objectivist-positivist view reifies the person as a job or a position in the reified organization, taking both as if they were interrelated components of a broader system. As I have maintained throughout this dissertation, unacknowledged in this account are the presence and actions of natural persons in natural social relationships, which cannot be subjected to abstraction and do not follow the rules implied within the organizational model.

Vaill argues in favour of putting systems thinking in its proper place, and his assertion about how we cannot know how we’re going to “dance with events in the system” until we actually do so is a useful acknowledgement of emergence. But Vaill’s position, much like that of Schön’s ‘reflective practitioner’ (1991), ultimately falls short. He acknowledges that the unresolved problem of ‘man and organization combined [is] a recipe for pain’ (Vaill 1989: 80), but his solution to assuage the discomfort is less than convincing. He proposes that the manager must develop a mentality that is ‘friendly to paradox...good at and comfortable with muddling through’ (ibid. 81), and that training and development of managers would look very different if we understood that ‘*the manager’s values, the manager’s comprehension, the manager’s actions, and the nature of the system* are four kinds of interdependent phenomena, all affecting each other, and all evolving together’ (ibid.).

Vaill’s proposal attempts to break the relationship of man and organization down into cognitively explainable and learnable phenomena, the interdependence of which can presumably be articulated and cognitively managed. Even at that, he recommends recourse to a mysterious ability to change one’s own mentality, and to looking upon management as art. Nowhere to be found is there any reference to processes of role enactment.

### **Taking up the paradox: The role of reflexivity**

The practice of managing must contend with both acting as if action may be directed from the outside, while acting communicatively within cooperative action, at the same time. Instead of recourse to art and changing one's mentality, other explanatory tools as to how this paradox is taken up are needed. Because all managing relates to human cooperative action, accounting for the nature of cooperative action within management thinking therefore is essential not only to defining managerial practice in general, but also how the paradox outlined above is taken up in particular. The investigations I have conducted throughout this research, notably in the area of communicative interaction derived from the work of Mead and Elias, lead me to believe that it is done through the reflexivity inherent within all processes of communicative interaction, as present in situations of sophisticated cooperation.

Practice consists of thoughts and actions as embodied gestures within the enactment process. When done with intent to direct or instruct others to act, or to precipitate the action of others towards a goal, they are gestures of managing. The making of such gestures is a telling moment: an idea, a spark of initiative, an intention. Even if conceived of by the manager perhaps as teleological cause-effect type intention, it ultimately must then be implemented communicatively.

When I intervene in my organization, at every turn I think, I plan and I develop the intention to act. I reflect. Then I move to action. This is the basic schema held by Mintzberg. However, from the reflexive point of view, at the same time I am aware that as I think about action, I am acting it out in my inner conversation, taking the role in turn of those whom I know or imagine I will be interacting with as I imagine them interacting with me. I also know that once I begin to act, interaction with others begins and engagement of my self in the interaction becomes tangible. Engagement is felt emotionally. Action, however planned beforehand, now becomes emergent and unpredictable and intentional at the same time, open to change and surprise in every moment. As I and the others advance, our interaction takes on meaning created between and among all of us, and reflects and becomes part of our individual and shared identities in the moment, relative to each other. As the situation continues to develop, the challenge persists as to what extent I and my collaborators can stay fixed on the purpose (the

intended meaning or direction of travel) of the action as it was considered at the outset, and how constant our shared conception of roles and organization will prove to be.

The management gesture, like all communicative gestures, is reflexive in nature. In Project Four I described how Stacey (2003), following Mead (1934) points to the social act as being reflexive, consisting of the gesture by one person, calling forth a response from another: the gesture and the response together constitute the meaning of the social act for both persons. At every turn we can know the emergent meaning of the social act specifically because we are conscious of our own presence in it. So, in interaction, our responses are not just unilateral reactions in the form of feelings, nor instinctive or automatic reactive gestures ritualized with reference to external sacred objects, nor purely cognitive interventions. They are new gestures made on the basis of what we have come to sense as the meaning and forward direction of the social act taking place. This is the enacted nature of reflexivity as per Mead (1934). Human social interaction rests on the human capacity for reflexivity.

According to this way of thinking, it is reflexivity and the reflexive turn which can be shown to be essential to role enactment as I have reframed it in my dissertation, and thus to the practice of managing in particular and to practice in general. It is the central function of reflexivity in human relating that makes it possible for managers in particular and organizational role-holders in general (i.e. practitioners) to hold the paradoxical position of interacting communicatively at the same time as acting under a shared perception that action may be directed from the outside according to the objectified boundaries and structures of the organization.

Rosenberg defines reflexivity as the mind's capability of taking itself as an object of its direct control. The text lays out two types of reflexivity: cognitive and agentic. The first is the idea that one can take oneself as an object cognitively, while the second refers to intentional self-regulation through the process of self-reflection: '...regulating what we do and shaping what we are' (Rosenberg 1990: 8). To a similar end, in contesting the 'extended reflexivity thesis' of Giddens, Adams (2001: 230) maintains that Giddens erroneously maintains that this reflexivity disembeds, detraditionalizes the self from tradition and culture, mistakenly championing reflexivity as 'transcending tradition' and language, and takes the contrary position to Giddens holding that it is precisely reflexivity which gives access to the effects of tradition, culture and embeddedness.

Combining Adams' position with Rosenberg's definition of reflexivity as allowing the self to be an object to oneself including taking the attitude of the other, making culturally-embedded self-regulation possible, shows the reflexive turn to be that which enables the practitioner to hold the paradoxical position I have been describing.

### **Enactment: an area for further exploration into the manager's practice**

So what becomes of the archetype of the manager as isolated, autonomous responsible individual?

First, and *most* critical, every manager must be held accountable not only for the work of subordinates but also for adding value to their work. Second, every manager must be held accountable for sustaining a team of subordinates capable of doing this work. Third, every manager must be held accountable for setting direction and getting subordinates to follow willingly, indeed enthusiastically. . . . In order to make accountability possible, managers must have enough authority to ensure that their subordinates can do the work assigned to them. (Jacques 1990: 130)

This is management as 'naïve artificialism recognizing no other principle of organization than conscious coordination of a conspiracy' (Bourdieu 1977: 80), promoting confident action as if communicative action, regulated improvisation, or sophisticated cooperation can be *made to happen* – planned, staged, formalized and then implemented – in the same way as strategic or teleological action. But there is a more serious problem; for if the crux of managing is accountability through the exercise of power, then the manager as described by Jacques is in a dilemma, where he or she, as the person accountable, must somehow affect the behaviour of others who then will act from free will using knowledge gained from within their personal experience.

Here is the nub of the problem: often it may seem that the accountability agenda wants to trump all else. We seem to believe, or in practice behave as if we believe, that the 'accountable' manager really does take the organization cognitively to be a predictable and ordered schema of specified roles and processes. He or she espouses this setup of organizational values and norms and proceeds to set targets and plan action according to that understanding, as if it were equally understood and shared by others; and finally takes responsibility for success or failure. The more sophisticated manager may think in

terms of systems. He or she will fathom the complexity of a system due to its human composition. The *very* sophisticated manager will apply critical thinking and tend towards critical systems intervention (Jackson 2000). At the same time, as I have described in some detail, the role the manager is enacting is emerging through an intensely communicative, interactive process wherein reflexivity is a central feature.

Others have also taken up the theme of enactment in managing and practice. Fondas and Stewart refer to ‘an enactment perspective or ‘emergent model’ (1994: 98), based on ‘expectation enactment’ which refers to ‘the impact the manager has on the expectations to which he or she will be held subsequently – impact that occurs as the result of the manager intentionally initiating opportunities to shape role expectations and as the result of automatic feedback and mutual adjustment between focal manager and role senders’, i.e. the manager’s primary interlocutors, who convey role expectations through their actions and responses (Fondas and Stewart 1994: 88). Weick (2001) concurs, positing that the organization and the roles within it are jointly products of enactment, socially constructed out of action, under the guidance of shared preconceptions of the situation at hand. ‘The term “enactment” is used to preserve the central point that when people act, they bring events and structures into existence and set them in motion. People who act in organizations often produce structures, constraints, and opportunities that were not there before they took action. . . . Enactment involves both a process, enactment, and a product, an enacted environment . . . the social process by which a material and symbolic record of action . . . is laid down’ (Weick 2001: 225–26).’

Perhaps surprisingly, the outcomes of enactment, when made sense of after the fact (Weick 1995), give rise to metaphors and models of the organization which then become self-fulfilling as they occupy a place in the shared definition of the situation. Weick (2001) talks about the self-fulfilling nature of metaphors (see also Morgan 1998), and models (as different schools of thought on management and the organization, see Perrow 1986) held in action, whether as regards organizations or the roles within them. As these models and metaphors take the shape of a shared understanding of the organization or situation definition, people act as if the related structures and strictures existed in the concrete world. They make an ideology of these conceptions such that they become a source of self-control in line with the self-control exercised by their collaborators. They



become self-fulfilling, and this diverts thought and conviction to the objectivist perception of regulated structures organizing the real world.

But I maintain that roles, organizations and their environments are constantly being redesigned by virtue of their very enactment. Even the most obstinate attachment to the position of manager as autonomous accountable outsider will therefore inevitably be mitigated by the very process of enactment of the role the manager is called upon to play. It is not even enough to characterize the practice of managing as that of group conductor as portrayed by Stacey (2003), Bion (2004) and Nitsun (1996).

Managerial practice must be paradoxically cast as maintaining control and accountability, at the same time as engaging in, freeing up and legitimating communicative interactive processes which are unavoidably part and parcel of sophisticated cooperation. This occurs through reflexivity and the enactment of the managerial role, reframed as discussed above. Both reflexivity and enactment so reframed certainly merit further research and debate.

### **Articulating my contribution to knowledge**

My stated intention in producing this dissertation was to develop a fuller, more inclusive account of practice, from that which currently dominates organizational discourse. In so doing, I sought to make a contribution to knowledge in the area of practice in organizations, specifically as regards management practice.

I arrive at the conclusion that, ultimately, practice in organizations is communicative in nature and entails the enactment of roles. Here I reframe enactment as a path forward to a new account. Enactment is often taken to mean that the role-incumbent fulfils expectations of the role as set by the organizational decision-makers acting as if behaviour conforms to pre-set organizational and role structures. In experience, however, role enactment is more accurately described as a dialectical process of co-emergence of role and organization, by virtue of the local social interaction of the persons involved. Because both accounts – the spatial-organizational metaphor and the processual approach – continue to exist in the practical world, they cannot practically speaking be mutually exclusive. It is therefore essential to take both into account in thinking about practice, roles and organization. In so doing, role enactment and practice become problematized,

in the sense that practitioners can be seen to be holding a paradoxical position within organized human activity.

The paradoxical position of the practitioner is particularly relevant to the practice of managing. Present-day predominant management thinking espouses an objectivist view of the organization, according to which managing entails accountability for the results of communicative interaction of others. I contest the adequacy and exclusivity of this position, and maintain that the practice of managing is also thoroughly communicative in nature. The co-presence of both the objectivist and emergent accounts in the practice of managing requires that the manager paradoxically holds both positivist and emergent views of role and organization at the same time in experiences of managing. This paradox can never be resolved, and is instead taken up by the practitioner by virtue of the reflexivity central to all processes of communicative interaction. It follows that acknowledging processes of enactment and the centrality of reflexivity in the practice of managing and bringing that to the attention of managers and management educators will enhance how managing sophisticated cooperation is understood and carried out.

### **A review of methodology**

I have characterized my methodology as both reflexive and as bricolage, and this dissertation is an expression of this approach. In the first instance, the writing of narratives of ordinary active life experiences suggested that practice, as I have been using the term, is complex in ways that discourse on practice does not address. Addressing this apparent void has proved to be a complex challenge; the answer, if there was to be one, lay in my own experience. My methodology therefore required linking narrative, literature and argument to provide insights that would fill the void and form an alternative account.

The reflexivity aspect of this approach is to be found, first, in the writing of the narratives, which produced insights and themes of interest in relation to the broader theme of practice; and second in the reflexive reading of literature on subjects related to experience in organizations and organized activity. By the term reflexive reading, I am suggesting that it is the closely attentive writing about whole arguments in published works which made it possible for me perceive themes such as habituation, conversation, emotionality, liveliness, enactment and reflexivity as being related to practice and therefore relevant to the account I was in the process of building. These themes stand in

stark contrast to the dominant objectivist account of practice, and it is by exploring the nature of this contrast that we can see that the void mentioned above is due to the absence of an account of communicative interaction in dominant accounts of practice.

The reflexivity of the writing process, whether in narrative or expository mode, has made it possible for me to recognize that practice entails communicative processes of role enactment, to identify the paradox that this entails, and then to perceive the omission of reflexivity from the dominant accounts of practice. I have arrived at this position by adding pieces iteratively in a building process over the course of the dissertation. The method of bricolage has allowed me to add parts because I came to know of them as I progressed: as more came to be known, more could be added, so that my account may be viewed as open-ended and susceptible to further development in the future. In this light, bricolage entailed setting a direction of travel for the research at the outset, and being reflexively attentive to themes emerging and creative in the use of materials that came to be known as progress was made.

The final point to be considered involves the issues of validity and generalizability which I raised early in this dissertation. First, I have suggested that validity rests largely on the verisimilitude of the accounts of experience, both as regards the narratives but also as regards the conduct of the research and the production of the dissertation. I am confident that the scope, variety and straightforward accounts of the experiences covered in the narratives, as well as the clear linkage to practice of the themes I have evoked and addressed, do constitute sufficient verisimilitude and therefore do warrant the validity of the research. Second, I believe that adequate generalizability also obtains, due to the ordinary nature of the experiences I have written about; that they were all experiences of cooperation among several people for whom the experience was also ordinary; and that the positions I have arrived at in this dissertation have all been developed with reference to published accounts of experience in organization and thought on experience in organizations.

## **Conclusion**

At the very beginning of this dissertation, I made reference to Parker Palmer's notion that the active life consists of contemplation-and-action. To me, now, this appears to have been an intuitive statement in favour of the central importance of reflexivity in action generally and practice and role enactment in particular.

Reflexivity and the reflexive turn are largely absent from management thinking and discourse. To the extent that it is representative, Mintzberg (2004) refers to a particularly instrumental form of reflection on events and outcomes, as a way to look deeper for hard-to-detect positivist explanations of events and (teleological) actions to take. This kind of reflection ‘progresses through four distinct stages: (a) articulation of a problem, (b) analysis of that problem, (c) formulation and testing of a tentative theory to explain the problem, (c) [*sic*] action (or deciding whether to act)’ (Daudelin 1996: 39). This is first order reflexivity as posited by Wiley (1994). It contains no account of self-reflection or the reflexive turn, and reveals such management thought to be grievously deficient.

I believe this lack of acknowledgement is widespread in organizational management thinking, thanks to the dominance of objectivist-positivist ways of casting the world of organized action. This dominant position puts this way of seeing beyond question, locating it on the hither side of inquiry, taken for granted and self evident in practical relating. But one cannot engage in the social world of organizations without being reflexive through and through. Managers are reflexive at every turn; but neither they nor the pundits recognize this fact.

Would it matter if managers did recognize the reflexive dimension of their activities? Speaking from my own experience of producing this thesis over the last three years while I have gotten on with my own practice, of which this research and writing were very much a part, there is no doubt that awareness of the reflexive position changes the way I manage. The reflexive turn is over and above all a constant effort to remain conscious in every moment of how one is forming and being formed in the pursuit of organizational goals, and to remain open to the effect that this has on oneself and on organizational life. The reflexive turn is not instrumental or functionalist, and therefore is not a strategy for greater operating effectiveness or efficiency. Enhanced reflexivity then can only be a pathway, to greater sophisticated cooperation.

Finally, I would consider my contribution in this field of practice and management also to touch upon the overall understanding of the debate amongst the holders of the divergent and contradictory spatial-structural and processual views of organizational life. In fact, it is this very divergence that is significant. These concepts have to do with organized or semi-organized human activities in much the same way as they concern aesthetics, religion and politics. Notions such as these are what W. B. Gallie has called ‘essentially

contested concepts' because they give rise to disputes which 'although not resolvable by argument of any kind, are nevertheless sustained by perfectly respectable arguments and evidence. This is what I mean by concepts that are essentially contested; concepts the proper use of which inevitably involves endless disputes about their proper uses on the part of their users' (see Shotter 1993: 170).

To paraphrase liberally, and much along the same lines of Habermas's 'communicative rationality' (1984), Shotter goes on to argue that the character of such concepts must be open and prospective such that their development can take place along different lines, and that the holders of one line contest that of others while their own is equally contested by those others, each using their own in the dispute with the others. In addition, it is this very competition that enables further development of the concept and also prevents the ending of the contest, thus allowing new developments to take place. This puts 'essentially contested concepts' beyond simple disagreements because there is something about their nature to motivate a dispute; each claim in favour of a certain solution or line of development only makes sense in relation the rival claims it has been developed to counter. Likewise there is no elimination of rivals since neither side can claim victory because of the prospective or continually open character of the subject. An important example is the way in which the concept of democracy is developed in civil society (Shotter 1993).

It seems worthwhile to regard organizational life as an essentially contested concept in this same way. It is the dispute between different lines of development, as in the case of systems thinking versus complex responsive processes thinking, that will allow the entire concept to develop. Thus I have found it interesting, in considering my own narratives, to reflect the concept of complex responsive processes of relating more often than not in opposition to systems or other positivist thinking. In fact I did so as if the systems thinkers were an other who was holding a counter line of argument. This was important because, to paraphrase Shotter, it is important to consider the positions which are being criticized, otherwise the argumentative meaning of one's position will be lost.

Each of us, in an important sense, has a special relationship to organizational life in the context of our active lives. The contest between opposing, though valid, claims to knowledge about organizational life is grounded in their *de facto* co-existence in experience within organizations, making practice, role and organization essentially

contested concepts. The point is not to eliminate debate and 'win' the argument or end the contest, but to continue the development of the essentially contested concept of organizational life in all of its possible facets and thus grow the social fund of knowledge.

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